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ABSTRACT

This book presents practical solutions for teaching foreign language learners self instruction, ranging from needs analysis to resourcing, strategy training and monitoring tools. Special emphasis is placed on different ways in which learners can be supported by learning how to analyze their own needs and set their own goals, how to choose the most effective means to reach those goals, and how to monitor their own progress. Chapter titles include the following: "What is a Learner Training Programme?" "Aids for Goal Setting"; "Providing Learning Resources"; "Helping Learners Monitor Their Own Progress"; "The Learners' Response"; "Controlling Standards"; "A Few Questions for Future Development"; "Preferences"; and "Photocopiable Appendices." The references chapter is an annotated list of resources in print and electronic form. (Contains 31 references.) (KFT)

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Training Learners for Self-Instruction

María Fernández-Toro

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Training Learners for Self-Instruction

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María Fernández-Toro

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1 INTRODUCTION

Self-instruction is by no means a new concept in language teaching. Teach-yourself packages have been widely available to the general public for a few decades, some of them with great commercial success. Learning without a teacher is indeed one of the options that are available to language learners, who may choose this approach for a variety of reasons, either as the only means of learning the language, or in combination with formal instruction. Most resource centres in language teaching institutions set out to offer the learners a range of materials especially designed for self-instruction, and students are generally encouraged to work on their own, even if they are already attending a language class. Whether it is in the form of teacher-set homework or completely autonomous exploration, all language learners will at some point be working without a teacher.

In recent years, the role of self-instruction has become an important issue in higher, further, and even secondary education. As international exchanges have been increasing steadily over the last few years, both in the sectors of industry and education, a new type of approach to language teaching has developed. Students from a wide variety of backgrounds are now learning languages for very practical reasons, and institutions have to equip them with the skills that they will require in this new working environment. Each home department may determine a number of constraints on timetabling, modules available for foreign languages, type of language skills required, students' previous experience and so on. In this context, self-instruction can provide a degree of flexibility that could not be achieved exclusively by means of formal instruction.

With shrinking resources and increasing competition, self instruction is sometimes regarded as a way to cut down on contact hours, thus reducing staffing costs. This is in fact a false economy. For the learning experience to be successful, learners require appropriate support, not only in the form of learning materials (many of which are produced by teachers), but also advice and training. No resource centre can operate effectively without the backup of adequate human resources.

The interest in self-instruction is also closely related to pedagogical considerations, such as the concept of learner autonomy, whereby learners themselves 'take charge' of their own learning by making a number of choices.[1] It has been pointed out that a self-instructed learner is not necessarily autonomous (self-instruction materials can be extremely directive in some cases) and that on the other hand genuine autonomy can take place even in a formal class setting (learners can control their level of involvement). Yet self-instruction is a situation in which learner autonomy can be particularly relevant, given the physical absence of a teacher to conduct the learning activities. Learners who are equipped with the ability to make the right

1. For reasons of space, the concept of learner autonomy cannot be discussed in greater detail. See Broady & Kenning (1996) for a discussion of the issues involved.

choices outside the classroom should be better prepared to face the demands of real life. They might for instance find themselves a job which requires a specific skill that was not explicitly covered in their university syllabus. If they are truly autonomous when they reach this point, they will take action in order to fill the gap, and good learner-training will pay off insofar as it enables them to choose the best means to achieve their new learning goal.

1.1 AIM AND SCOPE OF THIS BOOK

This book sets out to demonstrate through specific examples how learner training can be implemented in higher education as a formally assessed module, within the principle of learner autonomy. Although most of the examples described are from programmes that were developed at the University of Newcastle (Language Centre), non-university departments should also be able to adapt the basic principles that are presented here. Throughout the book, variations from the options that were tried out at Newcastle University will be suggested so that readers can apply the same ideas to a wide variety of learning environments.

The purpose of this book is not to formulate general theoretical claims as to the validity of the methodological principles illustrated here. It should rather be regarded as a working document, which sets out to describe our practical response to a perceived need within our institution. It is not a research study on how effective self-instruction might be in itself, and systematic data collection was not in the author's mind at the time these courses were developed. They were simply created to meet an urgent existing demand, with principal emphasis on implementation, course management and the production of manageable assessment tools. Readers will find that most of the examples discussed are directly based on the particular setting of Newcastle University Language Centre, yet a much broader reading should also be possible. With other institutions in mind, a number of alternatives are proposed throughout the book, suggesting other ways in which similar principles could be adapted to very different settings. Although the latter have not been tried and tested at Newcastle University, they might still provide inspiration for further developments in different areas of education and training.

Some readers may already have experience of learner training and simply be looking for different approaches to the same problems, others may be considering learner training for the first time and wonder how to get started in practical terms. By presenting colleagues with different ways in which to tackle learner training, it is hoped that further developments will follow, gradually adding to the existing body of expertise. Readers are therefore encouraged to make critical use of the material and ideas presented in the book, testing and modifying the documents provided, investigating different solutions from the ones suggested, seeking to identify issues that require closer attention, and so on.

Although this is not a research study in itself, the experiences described certainly call for further research in a variety of areas, such as language achievement after training in self-instruction skills, actual long-term strategy development, and the validity and reliability of the assessment procedures suggested, to name only a few. Future research may challenge some of the approaches presented here; yet if this

book contributes in any way to the process of developing learner training expertise, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

One last point needs to be made regarding the terminology that is used throughout the book. Many different terms are used in the literature to refer to the members of staff who assist learners in their learning process. In a conventional course, they are simply called 'teachers', 'tutors' or 'instructors'. In a self-instruction environment, the most commonly used name is 'advisors' (or 'helpers'), which stresses their role as facilitators.

The language advisor is another resource to which self-taught learners can turn, both during the training programme and after it, once they have become proficient strategy users. In the training programmes described here, not all learners have reached that stage yet, and although they are beginning to use the advisor as a resource, the same person also often acts as 'instructor' or 'tutor' through regular contact hours and a certain amount of input, especially at the initial stages. Therefore, both denominations will be used in this book, depending on which aspect of the tutor/advisor's role is predominant in each case. Some institutions (e.g. University of Hull) have already established a clear-cut separation between teachers and advisors on the grounds that the advisor should be totally independent from direct teaching in order to focus entirely on the learner. The leading principle is that learners don't feel that they are being judged and feel able to express their real needs. In theory, a language advisor should not even be expected to be familiar with the foreign language in question. This total independence principle appeared impossible to implement in the present situation at Newcastle University (as I suspect it would in many other institutions). While the programmes described here were developed, both roles of teacher and advisor had to be performed by the same person, and it seemed rather artificial to make a perfect role distinction where only one individual was involved. Perhaps in future, once the learner training programmes become more established, different 'helper' profiles should begin to emerge naturally, and probably become separate jobs altogether.

The term 'programme co-ordinator' is used occasionally in later chapters regarding matters of programme management. Finally, the familiar term 'teacher' is used in some of the documents produced for the students, because it is the term that they would naturally use themselves. 'Teacher' also denotes the linguistic and pedagogical expertise acquired through education and professional training.

As for the learners, they are often referred to as 'students', simply because all the learners mentioned in this book happened to be university students. Masculine and feminine gender will be used alternately, while respecting the gender of the original person where specific examples are given.

1.2 From formal instruction to learner training

As explained earlier, learner training programmes at Newcastle University were developed in response to a very practical need. A brief look at language courses for non-specialists over the last few years clearly shows how courses on offer have been evolving to meet the perceived demand. Let us examine, for example, the case of

language courses for Mechanical Engineering undergraduates. Students on the M.Eng. (Europe) course normally attend language classes during the first year according to their level of proficiency, which can range from complete beginner to post-A-level. In the second year they continue with the same language, but instead of two modules they take three. Normally, the third year is spent in a European university (France, Spain or Germany), and there is no language instruction in the final year. Figure 1.1. (below) illustrates how language teaching provision for these students in year two of their degree has evolved over the last few years:

Figure 1.1
Language teaching provision for M. Eng. (Europe), stage II at Newcastle University

Phase 1 (1991–1992)	Intake:	12 learners of Spanish (elementary level)
	Course format:	Formal instruction only (not yet modular)
	New problem:	➔ *Need to cover subject-specific language*
Phase 2 (1992–1994)	Intake:	8 to 12 learners of Spanish (elementary level) 10 learners of German (post-GCSE, not all Mech. Eng.)
	Course format:	Formal instruction + project (not yet modular)
	New problem:	➔ *Need to satisfy different module weightings*
Phase 3 (1994–1995)	Intake:	8 learners of Spanish (2 beginners, 6 elementary) 2 learners of German (post-GCSE)
	Course format:	Formal instruction (2 modules) + project (1 module)
	New problem:	➔ *Need to broaden the scope of learning experience*
Phase 4 (1995–1996)	Intake:	8 learners of French (post-GCSE) 1 learner of German (post-GCSE)
	Course format:	Formal instruction (2 modules) + project and self-study plan (1 module)
	New problem:	➔ *Need to ensure a viable class size*
Phase 5 (1996–1997)	Intake:	2 learners of Spanish (elementary level, 1 from Economics dept.) 2 learners of German (post-GCSE) 3 learners of French (post-A-level)
	Course format:	Formal instruction (2 modules) + project and self-study plan (1 module), non-language-specific (all trained together), open to other departments
	New problem:	➔ *Need for a wider range of module formats*
Phase 6 (1998– . . .)	A choice of three different modules available: • Oral project + self-study plan (same as before) • Language learning skills • Written project	

Phase 1 Initially, the same type of conventional course was taught to all non-language specialists.

Phase 2 The need for subject-specific language was addressed from 1992 by introducing an oral presentation on a semi-technical topic ('oral presentation' above) as part of the coursework.

Phase 3 When the University adopted a modular system in 1994–95, Mechanical Engineering students were required to take one more module than students from other departments. It was then decided to establish the oral presentation as a stand-alone module that they would take in addition to the two-module conventional course that they took with the other students.

Phase 4 It soon became obvious that the preparation required for the project presentation involved a wide range of learning strategies, which led to introducing an explicit learner-training component in the module (the 'self-study plan' introduced in 1995–96). This module is described in section 2.2.4 of chapter 2.

Phase 5 In 1996–97, the module would not have been allowed to run in its existing form for financial reasons, due to unusually small numbers in each of the three languages. The solution was to allow one student from another department (Economics) to take the module, and to merge all three languages into one group, taught by one bilingual tutor (Spanish and French), with regular assistance from a German tutor who catered for language-specific needs in the German group.

Phase 6 Given the success of the module and the numerous requests made by students from other departments to have access to this type of training, two additional learner-training modules were designed. In future, all three modules will be available to students from any department, either as single modules or in combination with other language courses. The new modules are designed in different formats (see chapter 2, sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.3) in order to meet the needs of a wide range of new takers.

This brief history of learner training development in one institution shows that developing a training programme is an on-going process. With constantly changing needs, language teaching institutions must be prepared to face the challenge and offer ever more flexible options to the learners.

2 WHAT IS A LEARNER TRAINING PROGRAMME?

2.1 DESIGNING A LEARNER TRAINING PROGRAMME

Learner training can take a wide variety of forms, which will depend on the degree of learner autonomy that is being assumed and on the type of skills in which the training is to be provided.

In order to establish the aims and objectives of a typical learner training programme, we first need to examine what exactly is involved in the process of teaching or learning a foreign language. Whether the setting is a course being formally taught by a teacher, or a self-set learning programme undertaken by a learner, the person in charge of the programme (learner or teacher) will need to address three main issues:

1. *Establishing what needs to be learnt (goal-setting).* The target to be achieved is typically formulated in terms of a certain level of proficiency that has to be reached in the foreign language (or at least in a given aspect of the language), within a given time limit.

2. *Using the resources available to achieve these objectives.* A range of material and human resources can be used in order to achieve the set goals. The type of tasks carried out on the basis of such resources is also of key importance for success.

3. *Monitoring the learning process.* A set of procedures need to be put in place in order to assess the level of proficiency that has been reached at different points through the programme and at the end of the set time limit. Without some kind of means (however basic) for assessing the progress made, the learner will not be able to experience the sense of achievement that is so essential to motivation.

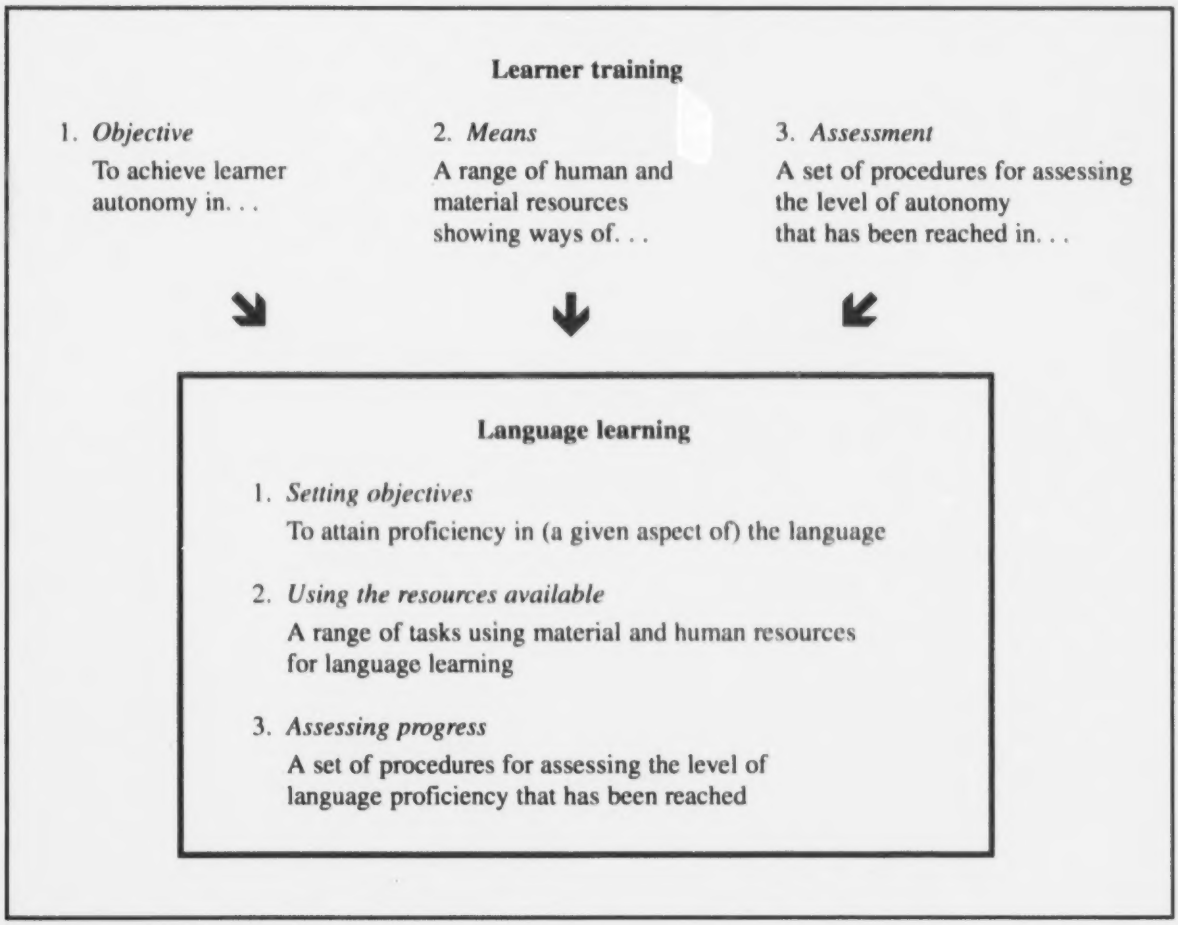
A complete learner training programme must therefore ensure that the learners are able to tackle each of these three aspects successfully, and as autonomously as the particular circumstances of the course allow. In addition, the learner training programme itself needs to have set goals, learning means and assessment procedures, and within each of these stages, all three aspects of language learning listed above should be addressed. The result is a set of embedded objectives (see figure 2.1) which would cover the following three areas:

1. *Goals* would be formulated in terms of what the learner should achieve at the end of the learner training programme. In this case, a certain degree of autonomy in each of the three aspects of language learning, namely: goal-setting, use of resources, and self-assessment.

2. *Means* would consist of a range of human and material resources intended to teach learners how to set their learning goals, choose their learning means and assess their own progress.

3. *Assessment* would consist of a set of procedures designed to assess the level of autonomy that has been reached by learners in the areas of goal setting, means choice and self-assessment.

Figure 2.1
Areas that learner training must cover


Learner training
1. Objective
To achieve learner autonomy in. . .
2. Means
A range of human and material resources showing ways of. . .
3. Assessment
A set of procedures for assessing the level of autonomy that has been reached in. . .
Language learning
1. Setting objectives
To attain proficiency in (a given aspect of) the language
2. Using the resources available
A range of tasks using material and human resources for language learning
3. Assessing progress
A set of procedures for assessing the level of language proficiency that has been reached

In this type of training programme, the actual level of language proficiency to be reached at the end of the course is not the main focus (although it is obviously an implicit goal). Instead, learner training focuses on the process involved in reaching that goal.

The underlying assumption is that, if a person learns how to use effective learning strategies, this is likely to produce a parallel improvement in terms of proficiency. However, proficiency gain may not be an immediate result of learner training: some learners will learn by realising that they have made the wrong choices at some point, and may become better language learners without necessarily showing dramatic improvements in language proficiency during the course itself, though greater awareness and motivation may contribute to proficiency improvements in subsequent learning experiences.

This approach also implies that proficiency targets do not have to be the same for everyone, thus allowing for differentiation. Given that the aim of the programme is to produce efficient autonomous learners, a weak student who proves able to set modest, achievable objectives and performs successfully in the related assessment should receive more credit than a high-proficiency learner who only manages to partially achieve objectives that were too ambitious in the first place.

2.2 TYPES OF LEARNER TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Learner training is a very broad concept, and its practical applications may take a variety of forms. Four basic categories are described here: skills-based programmes (where a range of learning strategies for each skill is taught to all students); customised programmes (where each student chooses what skill(s) to develop); project-based programmes (where learning strategies are taught within the process of producing a dossier or presentation of some kind); and integrated programmes (which combine more than one of the former approaches). The following sections will present possible course descriptions for various types of learner training programmes, focusing especially on aims, objectives and syllabus content. Means choice will be discussed in chapter 4, and possible assessment procedures in chapter 7.

2.2.1 Skills-based programmes

The actual skills that are targeted may vary with different groups of learners, depending on their age, needs, interests, learning institution, etc. A general framework could include the four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing, and possibly how to learn grammar, vocabulary and cultural background. The following example describes the *Language learning skills* module that was presented as part of 'phase 6' on pages 4–5.

Following the recommendation made in section 2.1 above, the course objectives address all three aspects of language learning: objective 1 of this course description is related to goal-setting, objective 2 to means choice, and objective 3 to self-assessment.

Module title **FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING SKILLS**

Aims The aim of this module is to provide students with:

i. Familiarity with a wide range of language learning strategies.

ii. An awareness of their own learning style.

iii. The ability to teach themselves autonomously a given language item or sub-skill, according to their level of language proficiency.

Objectives At the end of the course students should be:

1. Aware of the main areas in which their autonomy as learners can be applied (goal-setting, choice of suitable means and self-assessment).
2. Able to use a wide range of autonomous learning strategies for listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as well as for improving their knowledge of cultural background, vocabulary and grammar.
3. Able to monitor their own progress through the use of self-assessment strategies.
4. Able to understand their own learning style and selecting learning strategies accordingly.

Outline syllabus The following points will be presented:

- Assessing your language learning needs.
- Understanding your learning style.
- Making a study plan.
- Learning to learn vocabulary.
- Learning to learn grammar.
- Learning to improve your listening skills.
- Learning to improve your oral skills.
- Learning to improve your reading skills.
- Learning to improve your writing skills.
- Monitoring your own progress.

Examples and practice will be provided in each of the students' target languages.

2.2.2 Customised programmes

This type of programme is particularly suitable for learners with very specific needs, that cannot be catered for in conventional courses. Examples could range from students requiring remedial work or preparing for external examinations to those learning a foreign language for special purposes such as business transactions, academic talks, work placement abroad, etc. Adequate needs analysis is essential at the start of such a programme (see chapter 3). In terms of aims and objectives, the list given for skills-based programmes can be adapted by simply narrowing it down to meet the learner's needs as follows:

Aims	The aim of this module is to provide students with: i. Familiarity with the strategies that are required in order to . . . [*state student's specific need(s) here*]. ii. An awareness of their own learning style. iii. The ability to teach themselves autonomously [*the chosen skill(s)*] according to their level of language proficiency.
Objectives	At the end of the course students should be able to: 1. Understand the main areas in which their autonomy as learners can be applied (goal-setting, choice of suitable means and self-assessment). 2. Use a wide range of autonomous learning strategies for [*the chosen skill(s)*] 3. Monitor their own progress through the use of self-assessment strategies. 4. Understand their own learning style and selecting learning strategies accordingly.
Outline syllabus	The following points will be presented with regard to foreign language learning: • Assessing your language learning needs. • Understanding your learning style. • Making a study plan. • Learning to . . . [*list the chosen skill(s) here*]. • Monitoring your own progress.

Just like in the previous example, the three areas of goal-setting, means choice and self-assessment are being addressed in order to provide the learner with all the skills required to continue learning autonomously after the programme is concluded.

2.2.3 Project-based programmes

In this type of programme, specific skills are taught within the process of completing a particular project. The outcome of such project may be a written report, a dossier, an oral presentation, or even a compilation of audio or video recordings made by the learner, a personal Web page on the Internet, a computer programme, etc. The nature of the final product should be chosen in accordance to what is most likely to motivate the learners, ideally making use of any special skills they have already gained from other disciplines, and drawing upon their personal interests or anticipated professional needs.

The following example describes the *written project* module that was presented as part of 'phase 6' on pages 4–5. Here again, the issues of goal setting (objective 1), means choice (objective 2), and self-assessment (objective 6) are addressed in the course objectives.

Aims

The aim of this module is to provide students with:

i. Familiarity with the language related to a given topic (normally related to the student's discipline).

ii. The ability to produce a written dossier on this topic in the foreign language.

iii. The ability to discuss points of content related to the dossier in the foreign language, both orally and in writing.

iv. The ability to report on strategies and methods used in producing the dossier.

Objectives

At the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Identify what specific language is needed to write about and discuss a given topic.
2. Refer to the relevant sources in order to find the language tools required
3. Memorise the relevant vocabulary and structures in order to re-use them at a later stage.
4. Produce a written dossier to a standard that makes the best use of their current level of language proficiency.
5. Answer in writing a simple question related to the topic, in the foreign language.
6. Discuss their work orally, regarding points of both content and method, at a level that matches their current proficiency in the foreign language.

Outline syllabus

- Defining a topic.
- Finding and using sources of information about the topic from the target country (including fieldwork, and/or foreign contacts, and/or Internet).
- Using language learning resources efficiently.
- Giving structure to ideas.
- Putting ideas into manageable language.
- Presenting the work (incl. foreign language word-processing).
- Evaluating the production process.
- Evaluating the project as a final product.

2.2.4 Integrated programmes

Any of these approaches can be integrated within the framework of a conventional course, either in parallel (as in phase 3 on pages 4–5), or as additional components of an existing course. In the cases that have just been described, there is a clear emphasis on developing learner autonomy through learner training, but some institutions may prefer to begin exploring these issues more gradually, especially where there is pressure to cover a given programme in very little time. In this case, only one or two objectives listed above may be chosen instead of the full range. They may also be set as objectives to a particular lesson instead of objectives running throughout the course (for instance, a smaller project to be carried out in one week as homework). It may also be decided that the skill-based objectives (section 2.2.1) are all eventually covered, but throughout more than one year, or on

an ad-hoc basis, as and when a given skill becomes particularly relevant to the other aims of the course.

Integration may also occur between two different types of learner training. For instance, a project may be complemented by a parallel customised programme tackling the specific problems of each learner. The following example has been taught for several years at Newcastle University. The module was first introduced in 1995–96, and was designed specifically for second year Mechanical Engineering students planning to spend their third year in European universities (see 'phase 4' on pages 4–5).

In this case, the customised programme focuses on remedial work as well as areas in which learners feel that they need special preparation in order to cope during their stay abroad. The project component is an oral presentation on an engineering topic, which is filmed on video for assessment purposes.[1]

Obviously this is only one example, and the range of possible combinations is virtually endless. The relative emphasis on one aspect or the other will also vary depending on local constraints and individual needs.

To give only an example from this particular module, here are the profiles of two typical students. They were advised to take a customised course because they were the only two students requiring a Spanish elementary course that year (a typical example of how financial considerations may lead institutions to adopt a customised approach):

Student A: Stage 2 of Mechanical Engineering, also attending a lower intermediate class (post-GCSE, i.e. challenging for his level). The main focus of his self-study was simply to keep up with the syllabus of the lower intermediate course that he was attending. As the course was one level beyond his own, keeping up was a demanding task that required a substantial amount of individual study. As principal means of assessment, he used the tests provided at regular intervals in his coursebook.

Student B: Final year of Economics. In theory, her level of language proficiency was roughly the same as that of student A as they had both taken the same course the previous year, yet greater aptitude made her more confident. Her study plan focused on general reinforcement of her existing knowledge, with special emphasis on speaking skills. More specifically, she wanted to be able to do small talk with a native speaker, going through the topics covered in her previous beginners' course as a basis for the conversation.

Their choice of a topic for their video presentation is particularly interesting. As they were previous course mates and also the only students doing a Spanish project that year, they wanted to work together, yet their specialist subjects (Engineering and Economics) were seemingly incompatible. The tutor suggested that they could pretend to be persuading the managers of a company that a particular project was viable, both in financial and manufacturing terms. Their final talk presented the rationale for a plan to manufacture tractor axels in Guatemala.

1. See p. 68 for a review of Fernández-Toro (1997), a paper describing the video component of this module.

Aims

The aim of this module is to provide students with:

i. Familiarity with a range of language learning strategies.

ii. An awareness of their own learning style.

iii. The ability to teach themselves autonomously according to their level of language proficiency.

iv. At least a basic grasp of the language that may be required in technical settings related to their specialist subject.

v. The ability to prepare and deliver orally a technical presentation for an audience.

Objectives

At the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Understand the main areas in which their autonomy as learners can be applied (goal-setting, choice of suitable means and self-assessment).
2. Be familiar with a range of techniques that can be used in each of these areas to suit their individual needs and learning style.
3. Show some level of initiative in the management of their own learning.
4. Identify what specific language they need in order to perform a particular task.
5. Refer to the relevant sources in order to find the language tools required.
6. Memorise the relevant vocabulary and structures in order to re-use them orally at a later stage.
7. Get their message across orally in a comprehensible way, using their own words.
8. Use adequate presentation skills including effective visual aids, body language and voice quality.

Outline syllabus

- Assessing your language learning needs.
- Writing and managing a study plan.
- Basic teach-yourself techniques, including self-assessment.
- Tuning a semi-technical topic to a given audience.
- Using technical and general dictionaries (do's and don'ts).
- Giving structure to ideas.
- Putting ideas into manageable language for oral delivery.
- Designing effective visual aids in a foreign language.
- Oral presentation skills in a foreign language.

This degree of versatility would have proved extremely difficult to achieve on a conventional system comprising only a series of taught courses at different levels.

3 AIDS FOR GOAL-SETTING

3.1 INFORMATION ON GOALS OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

If learners are to become autonomous, they need to be involved in the training programme as actively as possible, and this process can begin right from the very first session. It has indeed become standard practice in an increasing number of institutions to provide learners with some kind of description of the aims and objectives of the language courses that they are undertaking. A typical example of course description for a conventional foreign language course would include at least a summary of the main areas to be covered during the course and a description of the assessment procedure that is to be used. If a teacher omits to provide this information at the beginning of a course, the learners will spontaneously request it within the first few sessions, because even in the most teacher-directed set up, people normally want to have some degree of control over their own approach to the course, and this can only be achieved if you know what the course is set out to do.

In a learner training programme, this information is even more important, and particular attention needs to be given to the initial stage in which the programme is presented to the learners. Basically, the same mandatory information provided by course designers in order to have their course proposals formally approved in their institutions should be made available to learners as well, with only minor changes in tone and register where necessary. The type of information most commonly stated in such course proposals would include:

- course title;
- accreditation (internal and/or external);
- entry requirements;
- teacher(s) delivering the course;
- aims and objectives;
- outline syllabus;
- teaching and learning methods;
- number and structure of contact hours;
- private study required;
- method and timing of assessment;
- learning resources available (including reading references);
- other forms of support available.

In addition, learners on a learner training course need to be made particularly aware of the following points:

1. They will be expected to take a number of initiatives that would normally be taken by the teacher in a conventional course. This approach applies to all three stages of goal-setting, use of resources and assessment, and may initially cause some confusion in learners who have always been taught in a teacher-directed environment.

2. The main emphasis is on learning to learn autonomously (see section 2.1 above). Good language performance on individually set tests is expected to follow as a result of the process, but the proficiency level of one learner in relation to his or her peers is irrelevant. Good test performance will be interpreted as a successful attempt to set a goal, choose the means to achieve it and to check that it has been achieved. Therefore, a low-proficiency learner will have the same chances to achieve his or her personal goal as a high-proficiency learner taking the same course.

3. Not only do learners need to try out a range of strategies that may be new to them, they should also carry out an on-going evaluation of the whole experience in order to understand the learning process. This involves producing a number of documents for the double purpose of raising awareness and gathering evidence of the progress made. Thorough record-keeping is therefore essential in this type of programme.

3.2 NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

The simplest way to start a needs analysis exercise is by means of a questionnaire. Unlike teachers, students are not trained to identify a wide range of areas of competence or to analyse their own deficiencies in these areas. This is why a needs analysis questionnaire has to provide learners with a structured framework in which to analyse their needs at the level of detail that is required, yet without using obscure jargon.

As explained in chapter 2, learner training programmes can take a variety of forms, and each will require a particular type of needs analysis questionnaire. In order to provide a reasonably comprehensive range of areas in the questionnaire given here as an example, a skills-based approach has been chosen. A complete version of the questionnaire discussed in this section can be found in chapter 10 (appendix 1.1).

This example, which was originally designed for undergraduate learners of French from the department of Mechanical Engineering, is structured in seven sections:

The four skills of . . .

1. speaking
2. listening
3. writing
4. reading

. . . and three areas of knowledge:

5. grammar
6. vocabulary
7. background knowledge.

Within each of the four 'skills' sections, the most typical sub-skills have been identified by the course tutor and listed in the left-hand column. Listening, for instance, includes sub-skills such as understanding directions in the street, understanding simple jokes,

understanding lectures, understanding television news, etc. Each teacher can decide which sub-skills are likely to be most relevant to a particular group of learners. This example focuses on the expected needs of the students during their year as students in a foreign university, but the list could easily be modified to cater for different groups.

The three sections based on 'areas of knowledge' are structured around lists of topics. In the example given here, the sections on grammar and background knowledge have been written in the target language, so that the subsequent class discussion can also take place in the target language (the discussion of sub-skills was thought to be too difficult for this group to tackle in the target language). Again, the language in which the questionnaire is written will depend on the learners' level of proficiency. Centres who need to cater for a wide range of languages and levels may opt for one single questionnaire written in English, though the sections on grammar and background knowledge will probably still need to be written separately for each language.

A few blank spaces are left at the end of each section so that learners can add items that are of special relevance to them.

Learners are asked the same two questions about every item in the list:

1. *How difficult is it for me now?*
   Answer options: very easy, relatively easy, a bit difficult, very difficult, impossible.
2. *How relevant is it to my needs?*
   Answer options: not relevant, second priority, top priority.

Teachers will decide whether it is best to ask learners to answer both questions as they go down the list, or in two separate stages: difficulty first, then relevance. The process of completing the questionnaire should result in greater awareness on the learners' part. It may be followed by a class discussion, in order to . . .

- prepare for the planning stage by identifying roughly what areas and skills could constitute realistic learning goals and which ones would not;
- give learners an opportunity to voice their fears and expectations about the course;
- reassure learners by showing them that other students share the same insecurities;
- make learners aware that no two questionnaires are identical, and that different needs require different strategies;
- allow the tutor to identify the general interests and attitudes of the group. This may help setting up learning partnerships between students.

Once this general discussion has taken place, learners should be ready to start a personal decision-making process by designing a draft study plan.

3.3 DRAFT STUDY PLAN

Armed with the preliminary analysis that they have carried out by completing the needs analysis questionnaire and discussing it with their tutor and peers, learners can now take reflection one step further. Unlike the questionnaire, which contains only multiple choice tick boxes, the study plan asks a number of open-ended questions about each skill/area. Its main sections are the same as in the needs analysis questionnaire: in this example, speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, background knowledge. If a different set of skills has been used in the needs analysis questionnaire (for instance, focusing only on one or two skills, or including job-related skills such as business negotiation strategies) the draft study plan can be amended accordingly.

The questions asked about each skill are much the same. For example, the questions in the *listening* section would be:

1. skills where I feel most confident;
2. skills that I need to improve most (describe your problems);
3. what I am planning to do in order to improve my listening skills;
4. help required from the teacher/helper.

It may well be impossible to tackle all skills in the time that is available, therefore tutors should ask learners to prioritise them once all sections have been completed. Deciding which areas are most relevant is a good exercise even when there are no such time constraints, because establishing priorities is the first step of any task planning.

At this stage, tutors will find that learners display a wide range of approaches to the task in hand. Some learners are immediately able to provide a very detailed analysis of their problems and suggest a number of sensible strategies, others will still be unclear about the type of skills that can be chosen as viable objectives or extremely vague about the means that they intend to use. The most common case is for learners to expect the tutor to set the goals and means externally, expressing varying degrees of readiness to comply with whatever the tutor decides is best for them. This is a fairly normal response in learners who have been through years of teacher-directed instruction. At this point, a one-to-one discussion with the tutor may be useful to help them become accustomed to the principle of learner autonomy.

3.4 LEARNING CONTRACT

Learning contracts are very often mentioned in the language learning literature. Their format may vary, but the basic underlying principles remain the same: to secure the learner's commitment to the learning task and to provide a tangible goal to aim for.

As any other contract, a learning contract needs to be negotiated and should be the result of a discussion between the learner and a tutor or language advisor. The role of the tutor/advisor is crucial at this stage, especially in cases where the learner's

study plan lacks clarity or initiative. It is well worth setting aside a special time slot for these meetings (20 minutes per student should be enough for one-to-one meetings). In the course taught at Newcastle University (typically comprising eight students, who are met individually), the practical problem of finding the time was solved by giving up a two-hour class slot and scheduling an additional hour at a convenient time. As one-to-one meetings may prove to be a luxury in some institutions, a tutorial format could be adopted instead, and still be effective with up to four students. In this case each tutorial would probably need to last at least 30 minutes. Alternative solutions can be adopted at this point of the programme in order to suit institution-specific constraints.

Another decision to be made is the language in which the conversation is conducted. High proficiency learners may benefit from discussing their learning experience in the target language. However, language barriers must not get in the way if a learner is trying to describe a complex learning issue that may be important. Therefore it seems best to allow low-proficiency students to resort to their first language (L1) if they need to. Alternatively, the choice may simply be given to each learner at the beginning of the meeting.

Whichever format it takes, the aims of the contract negotiation are:

1. To establish a set of learning priorities and, within these, a set of goals that the learner should be able to achieve within the duration of the programme.
2. To state an intended course of action, based on the means proposed by the learner, and including the tutor's suggestions where appropriate.
3. To agree on the type of assessment that would be most appropriate for the chosen goals.

The role of the tutor/advisor is manifold. The most obvious forms of help that can be given at this stage are to . . .

- help the learner establish the most relevant priorities;
- within these priorities, adjust the goals to the learner's actual level of proficiency, narrowing them down to achievement targets that can be described as objectively and precisely as possible;
- ensure that the learner's chosen means are not in conflict with his or her own learning style and personal interests (learners sometimes respond according to what they believe is expected from them, rather than to their genuine preferences);
- discuss how the chosen goals could be graded most effectively and broken into a succession of smaller targets within the time available;
- ask the learner to think about the practical implications of the programme (e.g. place, timing and duration of private study, etc);
- present additional ideas for possible learning materials, strategies and assessment formats that would not have occurred to the learner;

- bring together learners who may benefit from joint work towards a given target (e.g. setting up pairs for role plays based on similar real-life situations);
- through the whole discussion, make learners understand that they are now the ones in charge, while the tutor is there to help throughout the process.

At the end of this meeting, learner and tutor will sign two copies of the learning contract and keep one each for their records. An example of a learning contract form can be found in chapter 10 (appendix 1.2).

3.5 Progress reports

The learning contract sets up the learning goals of the programme in general terms. In order to achieve these general goals, though, greater detail is required. The tutor may already have suggested ways in which the general goals can be broken up into smaller targets. It is widely accepted that good planning and time management are essential factors for success in self-instructed language learning. Therefore students need to be encouraged to organise their work efficiently.

In order to establish good planning habits, progress reports require that learners keep a record of their work and report at regular intervals (how often reports are to be completed will depend on the duration of the programme). In these reports, they have to state clearly what their targets were for the given period (e.g. the last fortnight), give details of the work they actually did and report what they have achieved so far.

An example of a progress report is given in chapter 10 (appendix 1.3). On the first page of this report, learners must state the time boundaries of the given study period and the goals that were set for this period. The tutor will encourage them to balance the tasks, so that they do not reach saturation by focusing on one single skill for the whole period. For example, if one of the targets is to learn all regular verb forms for past tenses, the other target may be to prepare a role-play about renting a student flat, thus combining private sessions of intensive grammar study with more 'social' speaking practice in pairs. It is also a safeguard in case a learner fails to fully achieve one of the targets. The more different the targets are, the less likely it is for disaster to strike on both!

Every working session is then reported, stating date, materials used, work done, time spent on the task and any additional comments about the task. Learners are also instructed to keep all their notes as evidence of the work done. These notes are to be submitted with the final dossier at the end of the course, and returned to them once assessment has taken place.

On the other side of the sheet, learners are asked to state on what skills they are ready to be assessed (another way of asking them what they have achieved so far). This format ensures that half-way targets are taken seriously and allows learners to fine-tune their next set of targets in the light of their performance in the previous assessment exercise. Such procedure teaches them to produce goals that become more specific and realistic in each new report.

4 PROVIDING LEARNING RESOURCES

This chapter examines the human and physical resources that can be drawn upon by learners on a learner training programme. Facilities actually available (for instance in resource centres) will help to support ongoing learning. Learners should also be supported in choosing the best learning route for their chosen foreign language, taking into account any existing constraints such as study time available, proficiency level, learning style and so on.

4.1 PEOPLE AS A RESOURCE

When it comes to finding the means to fulfil a set of learning objectives, people are the first resource a learner can turn to. Not only the tutor/advisor, but also other learners and, whenever possible, native speakers of the foreign language can provide invaluable support. People make it possible for learners to use social strategies, which have been found to be of crucial importance for success in any self-instruction programme. The type of support that other people can offer lies mostly in five areas:

Giving moral support

A learner who is working alone outside the classroom is likely to feel isolated at some point in the process, and small difficulties can easily be perceived as overwhelming problems when there is nobody with whom to discuss them. Beyond any actual advice that they may give, tutors can also support learners by simply allowing them to express their concerns, and by showing an interest in any achievements made. Peers can play a very similar role, with the advantage of showing that they, too, have problems and need support. Native speakers, on the other hand, can be extremely motivating in their support because of the authority that their native speaker status automatically confers on them. Any successful attempt at communication with a native speaker, no matter how small, is likely to boost the learners' morale, as are native speakers' compliments on their performance.

Giving factual information

The first person learners are likely to approach when they require specific information is the tutor, especially regarding what materials are available, where to find a particular item, or matters of language usage. Peers may occasionally give tips to each other (about a particular book that they found, a foreign contact that could be useful, etc), and native speakers are mostly used for matters related to language accuracy and first hand information about the foreign country. Occasionally, a native speaker may also present learning materials to the learners (a foreign film on video, a trendy magazine, etc) which may well be different from what a teacher would regard as suitable for the learners' immediate needs, and yet

have an excellent motivation value, simply because they were selected by a native speaker.

Giving advice

Once more, the person regarded by learners as most competent for giving advice on how to learn is the tutor. However, tutors should encourage the exchange of ideas between learners and avoid teacher-dependence wherever possible. Learners should after all be the best judges of what works for them. Even when a learner claims to be 'stuck', a simple hint to look in a new direction may be all that is needed to restore a sense of progress. Advice from other learners can be extremely useful and is easily taken on board because it is more likely to be directly relevant to a learner's immediate learning needs than advice from people who, after all, are not experiencing the same needs. Although native speakers can also come up with useful learning tips, unless they are experienced language learners themselves, they may on some occasions lack awareness of the real difficulties that a foreign language learner has to face.

Giving feedback

One of the main problems when working without a teacher is the lack of feedback. It is very difficult to progress if one doesn't know whether one is doing the right thing in the first place. Although learners should be encouraged to seek all possible sources of feedback available outside the conventional class setting, tutors should be prepared to provide feedback themselves when no other source is available. Regarding feedback from other students, a common concern (often shared by the learners) is that peer feedback may be inaccurate and that serious mistakes could be overlooked. This may well be the case in some instances, but two brains normally work better than only one, and the very act of undertaking a feedback-giving exercise leads to greater attention on form. This procedure may allow a few mistakes to slip through the net (when learners simply lack the competence required in order to spot them), but most errors related to performance rather than competence are likely to be noticed through closer attention. In comprehension exercises, it has been observed that discussing possible meanings together leads to much better comprehension than reading or listening on one's own. Native speakers, of course, are also an excellent source of feedback when they are willing to help.

Acting as partners in learning tasks

Except for pronunciation exercises and a few other drill-like tasks, oral work is virtually impossible without a partner. The ideal partner would of course be a native speaker, but it is not always easy to find one. Besides, the proficiency gap with a native speaker may be daunting for a near-beginner. Even when it is possible to work with a native speaker, it is a good idea to try and give some kind of structure to oral practice sessions, for example using set situations for role-plays focusing on specific problem areas. Peers are of course ideal partners, even when their levels of proficiency don't match. In such cases, the strongest will help the weakest and

should learn in the process of teaching the other. Speaking is not the only area where partnership can be fruitful: the value of joint comprehension exercises was discussed in the previous paragraph, and it is also very beneficial to encourage learners to set tasks for each other. For instance, one learner can write comprehension questions that the other learner must try to answer, prepare a gap-filling exercise for his or her partner, they can quiz each other on irregular verbs, and so on. The tutor may occasionally act as a role-play partner as well, possibly in order to challenge the learner's ability to cope beyond the most predictable reactions from the partner.

One last important detail must be pointed out. In order for people to work together efficiently, there must be adequate **communication channels** between them. In most universities, electronic mail is now available to all students and is a perfect medium for making practical arrangements, as long as all those involved agree to check their mailboxes regularly. If this is not an option, a list of telephone numbers or a common notice board to be checked every day may be just as good. The important thing is to ensure that messages can be passed on quickly to everyone. There should also be an agreed system for leaving materials for collection, as a good deal of circulation of books, tapes and documents is to be expected between participants in this type of training programme.

4.2 Resource centre facilities and materials

If resources are to be of any use at all, learners must have *easy access* to them. The most practical setting for the needs of a learner training programme is an open access system. Ideally, learners should be able to come at a convenient time, as often as they like and for as long as they like, be able to browse through the materials and help themselves with as little staff intervention as possible (unless specific advice is required), be able to photocopy relevant printed materials, obtain copies of non-copyright audio and video material, and borrow anything they may want to take home for a few days. In this ideal world, every learner would have unlimited access to computer equipment, satellite television, audio playback and recording facilities.

Unfortunately, not every centre has the resources to provide such a complete service, and in actual fact one may have to find a compromise between what learners ask for and what is available. Whatever the constraints, the basic principle of openness should remain, and centres should endeavour to provide as much free access to resources as they can possibly afford in each particular case. For example, it may be possible to operate with fewer cassette players if learners are able to borrow materials and take them home; if space is the problem, particular time slots could be set aside for each class so that they can use the resource centre in turns; a modest collection of carefully chosen materials with clear advice on how to use them may prove more useful than a huge collection in which learners get lost because adequate guidance is lacking.

One facility worth mentioning here is the possibility for learners to *record themselves*, for instance when performing role-plays. It is an extremely useful learning tool, almost essential for self-monitoring, assessment and feedback purposes. In

modern audio workstations it is normally possible to plug in two headsets with microphones. If this is not the case, or if problems of noise in the room make this solution impractical (bearing in mind that learners may feel very self-conscious if they can be overheard by others), it may be enough to set aside a basic tape recorder that can be taken to a quieter room.

One vital tool in any resource centre is the *materials catalogue*. Whether it takes the form of a computerised database, a card index, a printed list or any other form, it is generally agreed that the following information must be included: the language of the materials, the level, a basic description (tape, book, etc), the skills and/or topics covered in the materials, and their location in the resource centre. Further information may be added, such as whether the materials are suitable for self-instruction, or recommendations regarding how they can best be used. If the resource centre operates a loan system, learners should also be able to put in requests for materials that are currently out on loan.

There is a number of items that would constitute a particularly valuable *collection of materials* in support of a learner training programme. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but a resource centre equipped with all the items in the list should be able to cover the most typical needs of its learners.

- A range of comprehensive course books for every language taught, covering all levels currently being taught in the institution (especially from beginner to intermediate, as lower levels are the most likely to need structured input). An essential feature to look out for is the courses' suitability for self-instruction use (clear explanations, suitable progression, answer keys and tape transcripts provided). The range of courses available should also cater for different learning styles (e.g. 'traditional'/'linguistic' vs. 'communicative', etc).

- A range of skills-specific complementary materials, covering the following skills:

  - Listening (comprising both authentic and purpose-made audio and video recordings, with transcripts for as many of them as possible).
  - Reading (language learning editions such as easy readers as well as authentic materials).
  - Writing (with some guidelines for self-assessment).
  - Speaking (such as pronunciation courses or GCSE role-play collections, with guidelines for self-assessment).
  - Vocabulary-building materials.
  - A range of grammars to suit different levels (with answer keys to exercises).
  - A range of cultural summaries for background knowledge about the foreign countries (for instance, a basic history for each of the countries where the languages are spoken).

- A range of dictionaries, especially large volumes of general dictionaries, which learners may not be able to afford (monolingual and bilingual), and a few

subject-specific dictionaries (ideally both bilingual and monolingual) according to the learners' backgrounds and most common interests.

- Teacher-produced worksheets based on in-house compilations of materials.
- If the centre can afford it, software versions of all the above where available, plus some simple authoring tools (such as Wida Software packages for creating gap-filling, text reconstruction and multiple choice exercises) so that teachers can easily design exercises for course-specific requirements. With little training these tools could also be used by learners to create exercises for each other.
- Subscriptions to a range of up-to-date newspapers and magazines, especially those that are not easily available through the Internet.
- A set of printed guides explaining basic information retrieval procedures such as how to consult the materials catalogue, tune into the different satellite television channels available, access relevant software, consult foreign newspapers on the Internet, and so on.

Satellite television and radio, on-line resources and study guides will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter.

4.3 Off-air and on-line resources

4.3.1 Satellite TV

Satellite television has now become a familiar feature of resource centres. Off-air foreign broadcasts are very popular with learners and teachers, and news programmes are probably the favourite. The use of this valuable resource can be implemented by recording the news everyday and keeping the recordings for a week in each of the languages available. Capturing the programmes on tape for a few days enables learners to come in their own time and to work more methodically than they would if they had to use live broadcasts. It also ensures that a group of learners can work on the same programme without having to come all at the same time. A set of standard worksheets for use with news broadcasts can also be extremely useful, provided that they are generic enough to be applicable to a range of similar programmes and specific enough to provide relevant focus. Advice on how to design generic worksheets is given in section 4.5 below.

In a recent survey of students' preferences and suggestions regarding the use of satellite television,[2] the following requests were made by learners:

- Clear information on programmes available (live and recorded).
- A wide range of programmes to cater for all personal interests (not only 'serious' programmes).

2. The survey was carried out at Newcastle University in 1997, with 106 students (beginners to post 'A'-level) enrolled on undergraduate courses of French, Spanish and German. The sample included both language specialists from the Spanish and French departments and non-specialists taking courses at the Language Centre.

- Compulsory tasks based on the news as an incentive to get started.
- A few training sessions in class to learn the basic techniques for using this type of material.
- Special timetabling provision within their own degree programmes for work in the resource centre.
- Support materials such as worksheets with comprehension questions, basic vocabulary, etc. The students were particularly keen to have transcripts of the programmes.

Support materials that are specific to a particular recording (such as transcripts and comprehension questions) are generally difficult to offer with off-air programmes on a regular basis because of the preparation required to produce them. Generic worksheets can be an alternative (see section 4.5 below). Ready-made subtitles can also be very useful where available. Very few video recorders allow you to record teletext subtitles, but it is a facility worth looking out for.[3] Unfortunately, not many foreign channels offer as wide a range of subtitled programmes as can be seen on British television with Cefax subtitles (888).

4.3.2 Radio

While satellite television is widely used for language teaching purposes, few people are aware that satellite radio is just as easy to receive, with excellent sound quality. Each satellite channel comprises one video channel for the picture and up to four different channels for sound. Of these four sound channels, only one or two are normally used for the sound that accompanies the pictures. The rest is either free or used by radio stations. It is, for instance, very easy to find *France Inter*, *France Culture* and *France Info* (all three of them) on the same frequency as the television channel TV5.[4] Obviously, these too can be recorded on audio tape and used by learners in the same way as they use off-air video material.

A number of regular radio compilations is also available on the market (*Authentik*, *RNE* tapes, etc). Although they cannot be quite as topical as off-air recordings, they are carefully chosen to have a reasonable shelf life and have the advantage of providing full transcripts, which makes them a very useful resource.

4.3.3 The Internet

Relatively new as it may be, the Internet is rapidly becoming an indispensable tool in any resource centre.[5] Here are just a few examples of how the Internet can be used in learner-training programmes (details of specific sites can be found in chapter 9):

3. The Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the British Deaf Association can be contacted for details.
4. Satellite stations move around very often. These stations may have changed frequency by the time this book is published, but even so, other radio stations will still be available in the same manner.
5. For a comprehensive review of the full potential of this medium for language teaching and learning, readers may refer to *WWW/The Internet* by Terry Atkinson, InfoTech No 3, published by CILT.

Source of input material for project work: Learners no longer have to rely on teachers collating relevant information for them, or on time-consuming and costly correspondence by post. They can now have direct access to government organisations, national and regional newspapers, a few schools and most universities, foreign companies, museums, sporting associations, political parties, activist groups, and so on. One or two training sessions may be necessary to teach navigation skills and familiarise the learners with searching strategies, as well as a list of useful Web sites from which to 'enter' the foreign country in question.

Possible outlet for project work: As well as a source of information, the Internet can be the medium for which the output is actually produced. Learners can create their own dossier and put it on the Web. Apart from the motivation given by the fact that their work can be accessed from the target country, the medium provides an opportunity to create links between related information in a way that is impossible on paper. If the topic is carefully chosen so that it can be of real use to people in the target country, the site will have more chances of being visited by native speakers and a genuine sense of purpose will be ensured. It is even possible for learners to produce a Web page that counts the number of 'visits' made to it by other Web users.

Source of input for reading and listening skills: The Net can act as a huge library, and the sheer diversity of material available should ensure that every learner is able to find something to read about virtually any topic of their interest. Training on the use of search engines may be necessary at the beginning (although learners – especially the youngest generations – often turn out to be more computer literate than their teachers!). Referring learners to the Internet can be a good way to fill possible gaps in the printed resources available at the resource centre. Foreign newspapers are especially popular as they can be read on the day of publication. Spoken audio materials as well as video can also be downloaded from the Internet for listening practice.

Supporting material for other media: The Internet provides up-to-date information on satellite television schedules (often difficult to obtain in printed form). Video sessions using satellite news broadcasts at the resource centre can also be prepared by looking up the main headlines in the foreign newspapers of the same day. Written news items can also be used as follow-up to viewing and listening tasks and provide feedback if learners are having difficulty understanding a particular item on the day's news. For learners of less commonly taught languages, the Internet may be the only way in which they can have access to foreign television broadcasts and other video/audio material at the moment.

Communication with other people: Section 4.1 of this chapter explained the importance of people as a resource. E-mail can be extremely useful in facilitating this type of inter-personal co-operation. Learners can easily use this medium to make arrangements with other learners for joint study sessions, seek quick advice from their tutors and, of course, correspond with native speakers. Tandem learning (a form of co-operation in which two learners from different countries agree to learn each other's language and help each other in equal proportions)[6] are becoming common practice in may centres. Such exchanges can only take place face-to-face if students belong to the same institution. Fortunately they are also possible across

6. For an example of this type of exchange, see Lewis, Woodin & St John, (1996). 'Tandem Learning: Independence through Partnership', in Broady, E. and Kenning, M-M. (eds), *Promoting Learner Autonomy in University Language Teaching*, CILT.

different countries through e-mail. Discussion lists can also be a forum in which learners can exchange ideas with other learners, or simply get a chance to use the language for genuine communication purposes.

4.4 STUDENTS' OWN MATERIALS

Learners themselves already use a variety of resources of their own accord. The list of materials that they report using includes quite a few that have already been mentioned. The most popular ones are discussed below, with emphasis on one point: resources that are chosen on the learner's own initiative are the most likely to be relevant to his or her needs.

The *bilingual dictionary* is by far the most frequently used (very few, however, would spontaneously use monolingual dictionaries unless they are already highly proficient in the foreign language).

For those who attend or used to attend a language class, *course notes* are also a useful reference for refreshing old knowledge. Students often like to continue using grammar books or course books that have worked for them in the past, and they will occasionally recommend – or even lend – these books to each other.

As for *newspapers and magazines,* they will frequently buy their own copies, especially if they find a publication that meets a specific personal interest. For instance, one Mechanical Engineering student based his entire self-study plan on materials taken from French motoring magazines, while another one decided to use sports magazines as main source of input. Advisors occasionally need to encourage explicitly this type of initiative, as some learners may feel that they are expected to use only what they regard as academically acceptable materials, rather than what genuinely interests them.

Foreign films are very popular and often proposed by learners as sources of input, especially for listening and writing (a number of film summaries were spontaneously produced by various students as writing tasks in our learner training courses).

As for *foreign books,* learners usually seek advice, especially when their proficiency is below intermediate level. This is probably for fear of choosing something too difficult (or simply because they don't know what is available). Again, a good resource centre should provide a sufficient range, as well as information on level and contents in the materials catalogue so that learners can make their own choices independently.

Human resources found by learners themselves outside the classroom (native speaker flatmates, friends doing a degree in the target language, etc) are particularly effective in maintaining high levels of motivation. Study pairs formed by the tutor generally turned out to be less successful than those formed spontaneously among classmates.

4.5 Study guides

It is not enough to provide a vast range of leaning resources. Most learners also need guidance in deciding what to use (the more there is, the more difficult the choice) and how exactly they can proceed in order to make the most of their chosen resources. The purpose of study guides is to bridge this gap between the resources and the learner by giving advice on possible learning strategies. In order to be useful, a good study guide needs to be short and simple. It must also:

- state clearly the learning objectives of each task;
- when many levels/skills/topics are covered, include clear signposts that help learners find their way through the material;
- for each task, provide details of *every step* in the procedures involved;
- provide means of getting feedback (in the difficult case of open-ended tasks, checklists or peer feedback may be suggested as a solution);
- be known to the students (a good study guide is one that they actually use!).

Different types of study guides can be designed to fulfil different purposes.

Language- and level-specific: Study guides that offer cross-references to all the materials available in the resource centre for a particular learning objective. They can also take the form of navigation guides for a particular course with or without additional tasks and input.

General advice on strategies: New learning strategies can be presented to learners in the form of worksheets. Essential features in this case would be:

1. information on the rationale and goals of each strategy;
2. detailed step-by-step description of the procedure;
3. suggestions for monitoring progress.

The example below is included in one of the strategies presented in *D.I.Y. Techniques for Language Learners.*[7]

Other simple techniques that could be introduced in this way might include:

- creating your own grammar drill;
- drawing up vocabulary networks;
- intensive and extensive reading techniques;
- jumbling paragraphs in a text;
- writing your own listening or reading comprehension questions;
- conducting, recording and using interviews with native speakers;

7. M. Fernández-Toro and F. Jones, *D.I.Y. Techniques for Language Learners,* forthcoming by CILT.

Technique no. 6.1	**Create a gapped text**
Task description	1. Choose a text that you can understand. 2. Make a photocopy of it. 3. Tip-ex the words on which you want to work (see *Uses* below in order to decide which words you should delete). Before you delete them, it is a good idea to copy these words in random order on a separate sheet. 4. Leave the text and the word list aside for a few days (until you have forgotten the original version). 5. After a few days, try to fill in the gaps that you created in the text.
Uses	• *To learn new vocabulary:* simply delete all the words that are related to a particular topic in the text (e.g. if the general topic on which you are working is 'football', take an article about a football match and delete the words for team, player, score, goal, etc). • *To practise specific grammar points:* you could for instance choose a news story narrating a recent event, and delete all verbs that are in a past tense. If your problems are with gender/number agreement, you could delete all articles and adjectives. You could delete all verb endings (for work on conjugations) or just every tenth word at random (for work on syntax and sentence meaning). If you are studying a language that uses declensions, you could delete the endings of all words belonging to a particular group.
How to assess results	1. Compare your version to the original text and count the percentage of words that you got right. If you are not sure about alternative answers, try to ask a teacher or somebody who knows a little bit more than you. 2. Repeat the task a couple of weeks later and see if you performance has improved.
Tips	• If you want to make the task easier, use the word list as a clue the first time round, then repeat the exercise without using the word list. • You can, work with a partner and swap your gapped texts. Talking about language questions is an excellent way to fix new knowledge in your long-term memory. This procedure also means you don't have to wait until you have forgotten the original text before you can do the gap-filling exercise.

- writing a transcript;
- creating, performing, recording and improving a role play;
- reading aloud within a set time limit;
- creating and recording your own pronunciation drill;
- shadowing (repeating while an audio recording is being played);

- learning a text by heart;
- back translation (L2 to L1, then back into L2).

Medium-specific: special study guides can be produced for specific media, such as the Internet or satellite television. The worksheet shown as an example in Appendix 2.1 was produced for use with foreign news broadcasts from satellite TV. In order to narrow down the type of questions asked and keep them applicable to any programme of similar characteristics, the worksheet focuses on one particular type of news item: protests. Similar generic worksheets could be produced for other typical news items such as diplomatic visits, sporting events, and so on.[8] The same principles recommended for all study guides are also followed here (explicit objectives, step-by-step directions and ideas for monitoring progress).

8. The idea of using recurrent features of typical news items was initially developed for EFL by U. Meinhof & M. Bergman, *ITN World News*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

5 HELPING LEARNERS MONITOR THEIR OWN PROGRESS

In order to succeed in their language learning experience, learners need to feel that they are achieving something through the study programme. Positive achievement needs to be noticed, measured and recorded at every possible stage. This monitoring process serves various purposes:

- reinforcing motivation by making actual achievement explicit;
- determining what to tackle next;
- modifying strategies used in the light of previous experience about what seems to work and what doesn't;
- keeping a record for assessment purposes (if required).

The most basic level of monitoring relates to the actual learning tasks that have been carried out in terms of time spent working, areas covered so far, materials used, etc. To go one step further, the learners could be required to formulate more precisely what they believe to have actually learned through those tasks. In this case the most logical way to check whether progress has actually been made would be to carry out a test related to the self-reported areas of achievement. Learners would then examine their own performance (assisted by teacher feedback if necessary) and determine whether their perceived achievement is backed up by actual performance or whether further work is necessary. The procedures described below aim to encourage learners to become increasingly independent through the different stages of this monitoring process.

5.1 PROGRESS REPORTS

The importance of progress reports as aids to goal-setting was discussed in an earlier chapter (section 3.5), but this type of document can also assist the learners in many ways for monitoring purposes by including the following sections:

List of all work done in a given period of time: Even before any evaluative analysis is carried out, it is useful for learners to see at a glance the amount of ground that has been covered and be able to quantify the time they have spent on each individual learning task. This record-keeping will enable them to check whether the materials and tasks chosen are generally relevant to the goals they have set themselves for the given period. The list of tasks can also, if necessary, form a basis for reassessing the learning means with an advisor.

Items to be tested: As their autonomy develops, learners are expected to determine when they are ready to be tested on a particular item or sub-skill. Providing a clear definition of what exactly is to be tested is in itself a skill that implies a good level of awareness. Expertise gained through this process can be extremely valuable in subsequent stages of the programme when new goals have to be set for the next period of study. Deciding what needs to be tested also puts the learner in charge, as

a natural follow-up to the learning contract that was agreed at the beginning of the programme.

Test format: While learners are normally able to come up with one or two items on which they Wish to be tested, they sometimes find it quite difficult to suggest a specific test format (see section 6.2 in chapter 6). Tutors may need to assist them by proposing a range of possible alternatives for each area/sub-skill. Increasing the learners' repertoire of self-testing techniques should in itself be one of the aims of any learner-training programme (see section 2.1).

Marking criteria: Except in the most obvious cases, such as the discrete-item tests so much favoured in traditional grammar, it can be extremely difficult for learners to develop a reliable set of marking criteria. Again, the role of tutors/advisors is to assist them at this stage, for instance by providing ready-made checklists designed especially for the skills being tested (section 5.5 below). For the learner, using such checklists also brings a greater awareness of the many sub-skills that a given skill entails and should therefore be of great use in fine-tuning further learning objectives.

5.2 Discussions with a tutor

As they produce their first progress report, most learners are only just beginning to understand the actual implications of the learner autonomy principle. It would therefore be very un-realistic to expect that they produce fully completed, workable progress reports straight away. In order to prevent test failure, and give learners an opportunity to clarify their expectations, brief individual discussions are normally required between them and their tutors at this stage.

When the initial learning contracts were signed, a rough breakdown of the general goals into smaller sub-goals for each period was also carried out with the assistance of the tutor. However, these sub-goals may need to be adjusted half way through the programme according to the difficulties encountered. The tutor's experience should facilitate the process by identifying potential causes of failure (e.g. particular difficulty in learning a given item that was initially thought to be straight forward) and suggesting achievable alternatives (e.g. narrowing down the scope of the initial objective, swapping round sub-goals from one period to another so that efforts are better balanced, etc).

A typical problem is that learners tend to submit a list of materials that they have used, without specifying what form a test based on those materials should take. For example, one of our students had set himself as a goal to learn 100 words of vocabulary related to motoring. He did attach to his progress report a list of 100 words in L2 with their translations in L1, but made no further suggestions regarding what format the test should take. In the discussion that preceded the test, the tutor suggested that it could involve writing a passage using 20 of those words in context. The form of the passage and the 20 chosen words would only be revealed on the day of the test. This format was approved by the learner, as it made use of his input, and was regarded as relevant to the achievement target that he had set himself. In this case, a very simple marking scheme could consist of awarding one point for each word correctly used in context, with a total score out of 20.

As this approach to test design is still relatively unusual, the next section will illustrate with a few examples how student's ideas can be made into workable language tests with as little tutor intervention as possible.

5.3 LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

The input provided by learners may take a variety of forms. Table 5.1 lists a few types of input that are particularly popular with students. The right hand column suggests possible test formats that can be adopted in order to use the learners' input as a basis for testing achievement on their self-set leaning targets:

Table 5.1

Learner input for test	*Possible test format*
• A list of words learnt (normally related to a particular topic)	• composition using . . . all words beginning with D all verbs all feminine words *(etc)*
• An aspect of grammar that the learner has been studying	• drill (either one already done by the learner, or taken from different source) • write/re-write a text using the given form • analyse occurrences of the form in a given text
• A summary or composition written by the learner on a particular topic	• fill in gaps inserted by tutor into the learner's text • re-write the whole text (or part of it) following given conditions • write and answer five questions about the text
• A copy of a text that the learner has been studying in detail	• explain words/phrases, find synonyms, etc • write a summary • translate a passage from the text • answer questions on general meaning • *write* and answer questions on general meaning
• A topic which the learner has been preparing for an oral discussion • A typical situation for which the learner has prepared a role-play	• act out with partner and submit tape to tutor • act out with tutor (surprise element)
• A tape (audio or video) that the learner has been using for listening practice	*In order to avoid answers based on written transcript:* • for video: questions that require attention to the picture *while* listening to the verbal message • fsor audio: questions that require attention to audible para-linguistic information (such as emphasis, speaker's mood, etc) *while* listening to the verbal message.

Each of these resources can be used in different ways, depending on what the learner's initial objectives were. Appendix 3.1 (chapter 10) shows nine examples which illustrate how very similar learner suggestions can be turned into goal-specific tests. Some of these examples will be discussed below.

A word list

The simplest test-setting method would consist of choosing a particular feature and instructing the learner to produce a piece of writing using all words from the list which present that feature. For instance, learners may be requested to write a composition using all the words beginning with a given letter, as in example 2 of Appendix 3.1, where the learner's second goal was to improve his writing skills regarding sentence subordination. In example 3, the learner's other goal was to learn French past tenses. Consequently, the test directions required him to write five sentences (instead of a whole composition), and the words that he was required to use were verbs taken from the word list, which in this case had to be used in the past tense. Other cases can be imagined where the tutor might request that the learner uses all words that are feminine, or those that belong to a particular declension, or (if the list covers a range of topics) all words related to a particular topic. Each word used with the correct meaning would be given a point. If an additional skill is being tested (such as the use of past tenses in example 3), separate marks can be allocated for that criterion (e.g. one point per correct verb form, or per tense correctly used, *in addition* to the points given for appropriate use of the lexical item).

An aspect of grammar

Normally, the learners would either provide a copy of the grammar exercises that they have done (or their reference in a known coursebook), or simply state the item on which they have been working. In the first case, an extremely simple test would consist of deleting all the answers on the student copy and asking them to redo some of the exercises without using their notes. Alternatively, the tutor might set a similar test taken from a different book or create one for the purpose. Example 9 in Appendix 3.1 shows how the film summary written by a learner was adapted by her tutor in order to create a test on French pronouns. A less time-consuming alternative is shown in example 8, where the grammar point (French present tense) is simply tested by focusing on accurate use of verb forms in the same writing task that is used for testing vocabulary. The percentage of verbs accurately used would constitute the grammar score in this particular case.

A summary or composition written by the learner on a particular topic

This type of learner input is often based on other materials such as a foreign film that the learner has borrowed, a magazine article that caught her attention or a book that she just read. There are three simple ways to turn these into achievement tests: one is to create a gap-filling exercise by deleting some of the words from a corrected copy of the learner's text as in example 4; the second is to ask the learner to rewrite the text (or part of it) following given conditions. In example 6, the condition is to

avoid using certain words in order to draw upon more sophisticated subordination techniques. To encourage greater elaboration, the learner could be asked to write and to answer five possible questions about her text. The repertoire of writing tasks based on learners' original texts is virtually endless and could include paraphrasing words/phrases underlined by the tutor, changing the length (half or twice as long as the original), merging or splitting up as many sentences as possible, trying to integrate three odd words that are not obviously related to the topic, changing the ending of a story, adapting the register for a different target audience (children's book, radio script, etc), and so on.

A copy of a text that the learner has been studying in detail

The tutor could simply underline certain words/expressions in the text and ask the learner to paraphrase them, find synonyms, etc. Other tasks could involve summarising or translating part of the text. The tutor could also write a few questions, either on the general meaning or on details of the text. Given that the learners should be very familiar with the text, the questions could require some degree of analysis, inferencing, or information re-structuring. An even more interesting type of question could be generated by learners themselves (this procedure also has time-saving advantages for the tutor!). Example 1 of Appendix 3.1 shows how a learner can be encouraged to take greater initiative in the process of testing how much of a text has been understood by asking him to formulate the questions himself.

A topic which the learner has been preparing for an oral discussion

Example 6 shows how two learners chose to work in order to develop their speaking skills. The specific aim was to achieve effective argumentation. They were instructed to record a discussion on a topic on which they disagreed (or pretended to disagree), interrupting each other politely at least four times during the conversation. Instead of a test in class, they were requested to submit a tape as evidence of their work. Although several takes were allowed, the tutor specifically warned them that the conversation had to sound totally spontaneous and could not be scripted, as this would be inevitably noticed in the recording and marked down. A list of scoring criteria (see section 5.5 below) was also provided to them for evaluation purposes.

A typical situation for which the learner has prepared a role-play

Learners planning to spend some time studying or working in the foreign country are often concerned about not feeling able to cope with some of the situations in which they expect to find themselves. As a result, they often choose typical tasks of everyday life (such as opening a bank account or finding accommodation) as speaking targets. Example 5 is from a learner who was planning to go to Grenoble and was particularly keen to make the best of the skiing opportunities that are available there. The range of material submitted for the test (including the student's letter to the skiing station and leaflets received from the station in response) shows

what an integrative exercise role-play can be, provided that all preparation work is entirely carried out by the learner. Learner-generated role-plays can first be tested on their peers (ideally, taping the interaction for self-monitoring purposes). Finally, the learner can produce a revised role card for the tutor, who may in turn decide to introduce a few unexpected elements in her interaction in order to elicit life-like reactions from the learner.

A tape (audio or video) that the learner has been using for listening practice

Two different situations are possible: either the material is only available as an audio/video recording (as for instance live satellite broadcasts and un-processed recordings of off-air programmes), or there is a transcript available to accompany the recording.

In the first case, the testing techniques used can be relatively similar to those described for written texts, for instance summary-writing or learner-generated questions about the recording. Consecutive interpreting could also be used (pressing the 'pause' button at regular intervals and prompting the learner to summarise what was just said), although simultaneous interpreting is a rather complex skill suitable only for the highest levels of language proficiency. For lexical work based on recordings, it is probably best not to give the words/phrases in L2 as this would eliminate the need to use word-recognition skills. Instead, learners could be given the words in L1 (or perhaps L2 synonyms) and asked to find what L2 words are actually used by the speakers in the recording.

Recordings with a transcript present an additional difficulty, although they are particularly popular with learners. It is indeed much more difficult to test listening skills once learners have had access to a transcript, as it is not easy to establish whether they are recalling the written transcript or the aural input.

Example 7 of Appendix 3.1 shows a type of test based on a video. In this particular case, the learner had been using transcripts in his preparation work. He was therefore given a task in which his recall of the transcript would be of little use unless he paid genuine attention to the aural input again. In this instance, the task consisted of finding out in which parts of the video the visual and spoken channels carried the same information. Other tasks (suitable for audio recordings) could require learners to spot which sentences are said with particular emphasis by the speakers, which ones are spoken as if they were 'in brackets', and so on. The basic idea to this approach is to match the verbal information with para-linguistic information that could not be obtained from a simple transcript. This technique can also be a good way to teach and/or test discourse skills.

5.4 Modes of feedback

As they generally come from a conventional, teacher-directed background, learners tend to rely primarily on their tutor to obtain feedback on their performance. Through training, a range of alternatives can be presented to them in order to increase their level of autonomy.

5.4.1 Common sources of feedback outside the classroom

Even in the most traditional environments, learners are expected to spend some time studying individually and will spontaneously develop certain strategies for obtaining at least a minimum amount of feedback. The most common of all is to check the meanings of unfamiliar words in a *bilingual dictionary.*

Wherever possible, learners prefer to have *answer keys* available when they are working independently, especially when they are not attending a course and the book is the only source of feedback that is readily available to them. It is therefore an important consideration when selecting materials for open-access that they offer this type of support. Unfortunately, it still does not solve the problem of open-ended tasks where the learner's response is less predictable.

For listening work, the learners' favourite source of feedback is *the transcript,* which eliminates the difficulties related to segmentation (knowing when one word ends and the next one begins) and word-recognition. Transcripts can be treated just like any written text: you can look up a word in the dictionary, look at syntax and punctuation to decipher a complex sentence, and so on. They are certainly convenient tools, although using them systematically could lead to an over-reliance on the written word and to learners paying excessive attention to every single word (bottom-up processing) instead of listening for gist and making inferences (top-down processing).

Whenever they are available and willing to help, *native speakers* are highly valued feedback providers, as they can respond immediately to the learner's output, offering advice on matters of accuracy and appropriacy. Unlike answer keys, they are able to give feedback on open-ended tasks, and are even likely to volunteer a wealth of first-hand information about their language and culture. Using native speakers for feedback brings learners one step closer to genuine communication in the foreign country.

Peers are also consulted regularly for feedback purposes, although there is always a certain level of uncertainty, as they might fail to notice some mistakes or suggest corrections on output that was originally correct. Nevertheless, peer feedback is extremely valuable for the reasons explained in chapter 4 (section 4.1). It must also be remembered that not all feedback is necessarily related to language accuracy. In matters such as communication skills, content, discourse structure and other non-language-specific areas, the views of a learning partner may be just as sound as those of an equally skilled native speaker.

5.4.2 Feedback in study guides

As well as providing step-by-step directions for a range of tasks to be carried out individually or with a partner (see chapter 4, section 4.5 for details of possible tasks), a good study guide should also give advice on different ways of obtaining feedback without relying on a tutor.

The use of any of the sources of feedback listed in the previous section can be improved through alternative suggestions that may not have occurred to the learner. For instance, although virtually every learner uses a bilingual dictionary to find the words required in a writing task, they have a tendency to accept the first L2 translation that is presented to them, often with the most bizarre results. A study guide could suggest that they double check the new word in the L2 section of their dictionary in order to make sure that its meaning is really the one intended.

Those who have native speaker friends could be advised to create role-plays simulating real life situations, ask their friends to behave as non-sympathetic interlocutors and see at which points communication might break down. The native speaker could then come to the rescue and propose solutions to the problem. If they are using the study guide with another learner, the guide should also include suggestions on how they can use each other as feedback providers.

The study guide could be especially useful in suggesting checklists of scoring criteria for open-ended tasks that would not feature in a typical answer key. Even traditional tasks such as gap-filling and translation could offer learners more freedom of choice if a study guide taught them how to create their own gap-filling exercise for a text chosen by themselves, or how the simple technique of back translation (translating first from L2 to L1, then back into L2) can be used with any text they like, since feedback on L2 output is given by the original text itself.

5.4.3 Tutor feedback

Is this to say that the tutor should be completely left out of the feedback-giving process? Such a position would be a rather wasteful over-reaction against traditional practice. The tutor is indeed a valuable resource, often the one that is most easily accessible to the learners, and it would make sense for them to use all the expertise that is at hand. Even the most autonomous learner would find it extremely difficult to progress without resorting to some kind of human feedback at one point or another. But native speakers are not always around, peers may lack the necessary competence, and it would seem logical that a language teaching expert should be ready to fill any existing gap.

The role of the tutor in a learner training programme is to broaden the range of strategies that learners are able to use. At the initial stages, this may well involve withdrawing *unconditional* assistance, in order to force learners to abandon the comfortable, passive role to which they are accustomed and to explore alternative solutions. The idea is not to suppress tutor feedback altogether, but to induce a new form of behaviour in which learners do not rely on it as the first and only option as a matter of course.

So long as this is clear, there is nothing wrong with using the red pen to highlight a mistake, clarifying explicitly a point of grammar, suggesting that a composition could be structured in a better way or asking a learner to repeat a word that she keeps mis-pronouncing. One point that is particularly important to the learners is that any material produced by themselves is carefully checked for grammatical accuracy before they are asked to re-use it in subsequent tasks. For instance, they

will welcome a quick look at their word list a few days before the vocabulary test, so that any mis-spellings or inaccurate translations are spotted before they are memorised.

After a test, the tutor may be the only person available who can easily point out existing problems, especially those related to language accuracy. Possible courses of action could be to highlight mistakes without giving a correction (so that the learner has to think again); or – if the learner is unable to correct himself – to correct the mistakes, but without giving a numeric score (so that the learner has to judge the relative importance of different mistakes).

One way in which the tutor/advisor can be of great help to the learners is by giving them ready-made sets of criteria that they can use in order to assess their performance on different tasks. The next section will examine how this procedure can be applied to each of the four skills.

5.5 TASK-SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT TOOLS

5.5.1 Assessment tools for receptive skills

Reading and listening tasks can be assessed using similar tools as both skills are of a receptive nature. The most convenient tools would be those that can be used with a range of texts or recordings, requiring as little adaptation as possible so that learners have total freedom to select their reading and listening material from any source available. On the other hand, a limited number of assessment tools designed for specific texts or recordings can be particularly useful for formative assessment, because this type of aid can diagnose with greater precision what exactly may have caused success or failure to understand the input.

5.5.1.1 Non text-specific

Subjective comprehension scales have often been proposed to learners as means to assess how much of a text or a recording they have managed to understand. The level of detail in such scales can range from a single general question ('How much percent of the text have you understood?') to those requiring more elaborated judgements from the learner. The following examples proposed by Ellis and Sinclair (1989)[9] for listening and reading illustrate the type of criteria that can be called upon in a subjective scale (see page 40 below).

For texts and recordings that follow a typical pattern, it is sometimes possible to draw up *generic sets of questions* that can be applied to all texts or recordings belonging to the same genre. This is particularly useful with news items because they can generally be allocated to a relatively limited number of typical schemata such as natural disasters, diplomatic visits, sporting events, protests, government reports, and so on. Appendix 2.1 is a worksheet that was designed for use with any news item showing people protesting for industrial or political reasons (a very common occurrence in the news). Obviously, the actual answers to the questions are

9. Ellis, G. & Sinclair, B. (1989) *Learning to Learn English.* A Course in Learner Training. Cambridge University Press.

Assessment criteria for listening tasks

Points to assess

Before you try to assess your listening comprehension, it is useful to think about some of the factors that help you to understand or prevent you from understanding what is being said. For example:

a) who you were listening to
- Was the person speaking too fast for me?
- Was the accent a familiar one?

b) the topic
- Did I know much about the topic?
- Was I interested in the topic?
- Did I know most of the words?

c) the situation
- Could I see the speaker?
- Could I talk to the speaker?
- Were there several people talking at the same time?
- Were there several speakers with similar voices?
- Was there any background noise or interference?

d) you
- Was I clear about my reason for listening?
- Did I use the best listening strategy?
- Did I feel tired/impatient, etc?

When you assess your listening comprehension you are really assessing how you cope with these factors. Remember that it is a good idea to concentrate on only one or two of them at a time.

Ellis & Sinclair (1989) p.59

Assessment criteria for reading tasks

Points to assess

Before you try to assess your reading comprehension, it is useful to think about some of the factors that help you to understand or prevent you from understanding what you read. You could ask yourself a few questions, for example:

a) speed
- Did I read too slowly?

b) strategy
- Did I use the appropriate reading strategy?

c) text
- Were there too many words I didn't know?
- Was the grammar too difficult for me?
- Did I know enough about the topic?
- Was the text boring?
- Was the text too long?

When you assess your reading comprehension it is a good idea to concentrate on only one or two of these factors at a time.

Ellis & Sinclair (1989) p.84

not given to the learners, but at least they have a number of points that can be used as basis to see what proportion of this information they manage to understand. The follow-up activities of section 5 of the worksheet also make use of peer feedback, even though more specific feedback is impossible on the worksheet itself. However, by recycling some of the newly acquired knowledge in further activities, the follow-up section should indirectly contribute to increase the learners' awareness of what they have learnt from the recording.

Another valuable technique for obtaining feedback in listening and reading tasks is to work out the meaning through *discussion with a partner.* The following conversation between two learners was recorded in a language laboratory while they were working through a tape of spoken Spanish.

Student A: Did you get any of that?
Student B: Yeah. They were talking about er . . .
A: What he does?
B: Yeah. What he does. Something about in the mornings and in the afternoons.
A: Architecture isn't it?
B: Archite . . . sorry? *[laughs]*
A: Isn't he an architect?
B: I don't know. I didn't catch that. They were talking about where he lives as well.
A: Uh uh. Madrid, weren't it?
B: Granada region . . .
A: Was it?
B: That's what I heard, but . . . dunno.
A: He's thirty something as well isn't he?
B: I didn't hear that. Shall we . . . do it in bits?
A: Yeah, and go through it again.

This example illustrates how one student's hypotheses are combined with her partner's, building up on each other: 'what he does' + 'architecture' + 'in the mornings' will later lead on to the final hypothesis: 'he does architecture in the mornings'. Gradually a level of understanding is reached that could not have been achieved by any of the two learners working individually.

Finally, an extremely simple technique for *monitoring lexical improvement* in reading tasks consists of underlining every new word that is looked up in the dictionary, and looking back at the same text some time later. Learners experience a great sense of achievement as they notice how the words that were once new to them have now become familiar.

5.5.1.2 Text-specific

Although they require additional work on the part of materials producers, tools designed for a specific text or recording are highly valued as quick and accurate means of obtaining feedback in the absence of a teacher. They have the advantage of avoiding the uncertainty that often results from non-specific forms of feedback.

Despite recent developments in language teaching which point out that the output of comprehension cannot be either regarded as 'correct' or 'incorrect', some learners simply won't feel secure unless they know for sure what the 'right answer' is. Many published materials offer the type of aids that are listed below and can easily be included in the resource centre catalogue. It may also be worth investing a little time in producing a few more to suit the needs and interests of a particular group.

The most traditional tool is the text or recording followed by a set of *text-specific comprehension questions,* with the answers written on a different page.

In order to clarify the meaning of a text or recording, materials designers may also produce *simplified versions in L2,* such as the same dialogue delivered at a slower pace, a version of the same text using a more limited range of vocabulary, and so on. These simplified versions can then be used by learners once they have worked through the full original version in order to check their understanding and fill in any remaining gaps. Alternatively, similar feedback could be obtained from a *written translation* of the text, a *transcript* of the recording, or a *summary in L1 or L2.*

5.5.2 Assessment tools for productive skills

Productive skills are more difficult to assess by learners themselves because the output of productive tasks is more open-ended than the output of receptive tasks. However, it is possible to facilitate self-assessment by leading learners to focus their attention onto a number of features in their performance.

5.5.2.1 Speaking

An important precaution to take in order to assess any spoken performance is to record it, so that it can be examined critically by the speakers at a later stage.

The scoring form shown in Appendix 3.2 was initially developed for use by teachers in their formal assessment of oral examinations, and subsequently made available to the learners for self-assessment purposes. It is particularly suitable for role-plays in which the points to be covered in the conversation are either listed on cue cards, or easy to work out by learners themselves. Using the standard performance descriptions provided in Appendix 3.3, each of these points is then assessed in terms of communication (success or failure in conveying the idea) and accuracy. The bottom section of the scoring sheet addresses general features of the learner's performance, namely: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, comprehension of the interlocutor's contributions, and communication strategies. It may be useful to go through the performance descriptions with the learners before they are asked to use the scoring sheet by themselves.

A similar scoring sheet used for self-assessment of oral presentations in a project-based programme can be found in Appendix 3.4.

Peer assessment can also be encouraged, either using the same scoring sheets or different feedback forms specially designed for peer assessment. Appendix 3.5 was produced for an advanced class in which one of the examination tasks consisted of a five-minute talk on a given topic. As a training exercise, students worked in groups of three or four, giving their talk for the others in turns. As soon as each talk was finished, those listening were required to fill in a feedback sheet before any comments were exchanged between them. After that, reactions were compared and the speaker was able to check how much of her intended plan had actually got through to the audience, using the notes produced in the feedback sheets as evidence. Question 6 should be particularly useful, as it is designed to provide substantial evidence of how efficiently content and structure have come across.

5.5.2.2 Writing

The same type of scoring sheet that was described for role-play assessment could be used for cued writing tasks. The following example is a typical writing task for a Spanish elementary level:

Question 5 Writing task

A Spanish friend is staying with you for a few days. As she is still sleeping and you must go, you leave her a note on the table. Write the note so that it includes the following points:

1. Explain why you have to go.
2. Tell her what she can do about breakfast.
3. Ask her to buy some bread for lunch (baker's just opposite your house).
4. Tell her that you will be back around 2.15 pm for lunch (spell out the time in full).

Your note must be just long enough to include all these points. Once you have written it, make sure you take a few minutes to check that all grammatical agreements between the different words are correct.

The scoring sheet for this task can be found in Appendix 3.6. The first section of the sheet follows an identical format as the scoring sheet used for oral role-plays. Here again, each of the points that were to be covered is assessed in terms of clarity of communication and accuracy. The bottom section is only slightly different and includes general features of the text such as vocabulary range, originality and style (see standard performance descriptions in Appendix 3.7).

This scoring technique is quite versatile because the actual criteria being assessed can be easily changed in order to suit the needs of different groups. Tutors (or learners!) with strong views about the relative importance of certain criteria over others could produce their own scoring sheets using the same format but different

weightings, rephrasing the standard performance descriptions presented in Appendices 3.3 and 3.7, or even replacing altogether some of the criteria proposed here with other ones that are more relevant to them. Encouraging learners to produce their own, revised scoring sheets can in itself be an excellent awareness-raising exercise.

Just as for role-play assessment, some preliminary training may be necessary before learners can apply this type of assessment tool on their own writing output. In addition, they may need to be told where they have made mistakes before they can allocate a numeric score to particular sections of their text. They may also find it difficult to assess aspects of their performance, for instance which mistakes would be most likely to hinder communication. In the absence of other competent speakers, the tutor should be prepared to assist the learners at this stage.

6 THE LEARNERS' RESPONSE

This chapter describes the learners' response to the training programme in four different aspects. The first section examines the kind of support that they requested from the course tutor at the beginning of the programme. The second section takes a look at their reactions throughout the stages of goal-setting, use of resources and progress assessment. Different tutor strategies are also described in these two sections in order to show how greater autonomy can be gradually induced through the training programme.

The third section focuses on the students' evaluation of their own achievement, as reflected in their responses to the final self-evaluation questionnaire, while the final section of this chapter summarises the views that have been expressed over successive years of module evaluation questionnaires.

As explained in chapter 1, these modules were not planned as research projects, and the resulting feedback might be of arguable value in methodological terms. Yet the courses are so new to the British university system that some details of the response seemed worth reporting here. A qualitative look at whatever data is available may still allow us to identify a number of relevant issues for future investigation.

6.1 INITIAL EXPECTATIONS

One of the documents that learners were required to produce at the early stages of the course was an open-ended study plan (see section 3.3. of chapter 3) in which they stated what their main problems were, what they intended to do in order to tackle those difficulties, and how they thought the course tutor could help them. A closer look at the various forms of support that were expected from the tutor at that stage provides a particularly interesting picture of general role perceptions and expectations. The examples listed below are from a group of seven undergraduate learners of Spanish with levels of proficiency ranging between beginner and elementary.[10]

Tutor as motivator

One of the students gave a short, yet revealing answer by simply writing the word 'motivation' under the heading 'help required'. Another learner wanted the tutor 'to ask the opinions and thoughts of the students on current issues'. Both examples seem to assume that motivation should be primarily generated extrinsically by the teacher. On a conventional course, the teacher should obviously try to keep learners motivated through adequate choice of goals, materials and tasks. On the other hand, good learner training should teach the learners how to make those choices themselves, so that motivation becomes an intrinsic matter.

10. This group of students followed the training module in its 'phase 3' (1994–95). See pages 4–5 for more details.

Tutor as prescriptor

Requests for the tutor to set compulsory work were very frequent, though it would perhaps be over-simplistic to assume that all such requests are simply the result of a history of teacher-directed tuition. The effects of traditional approaches can of course be seen in a number of answers requesting that the tutor personally organises a range of class activities such as 'listening to long texts in class and answering questions on them', but pleas such as 'I need to be *told/set* so much work per week' may also be reflecting an awareness of the importance of sustained discipline in any learning enterprise. A learner who feels that his own self-discipline is likely to weaken over time may resort to an external authority in order to keep it up. In such context, the request should be regarded as a freely chosen strategy.

Another reason for choosing a certain degree of external authority responds to the need to ensure adequate focus on what is most relevant: 'set more written work so as to exercise usage of grammar'.

In a few cases, the learners seem to have a very clear idea of what would constitute a useful learning task as they provide very specific descriptions of suggested class activities: 'set pieces of work to understand Spanish articles, then paraphrase the summary in our own words'; or: 'small tutorials where we develop a small conversation each time, graded'. It should be relatively easy to turn these suggestions into learner-generated tasks, for instance by encouraging learners to choose the articles themselves, or by asking them to find a partner and to draw up a list of possible conversation topics (the tutor could advise on how best to grade the difficulty).

Tutor as direct provider of tuition

A number of requests was made for direct tuition, especially in matters of language usage: 'clearer setting out of how to apply the rules'; 'occasional reminder of past structures'; and cultural information: 'give details on Spanish customs and lifestyle'; 'description of Spanish culture and differences with Britain'; 'the occasional red herring [sic] on the country's politics, culture and customs'. In a well-resourced centre, both areas could be addressed by directing the learners toward the relevant sources and encouraging them to select whichever materials are most relevant to their needs. The tutor could then adopt a consultative role as one of the many resources available, clarifying any points that might still be unclear and filling in remaining gaps.

Tutor as advisor

Right from the beginning of the course, most learners already understand the role of the tutor as an advisor, although the wording of their requests seem to assume an approach that is still fairly directive in some cases. Advice from the tutor is requested in all phases of the learning process: goal-setting ('which areas they feel may be of best use to me'); choice of materials ('suggest sources for such material'); strategy training ('best way to go about finding new vocabulary to

learn'); monitoring ('please guide me on a weekly basis and test what I have learnt'); and feedback ('correct letters and point out any mistakes'). This suggests that the training programme can build up on a few natural expectations that already exist in the learners. The new approach may involve somewhat unfamiliar methods to them, but the change that is required in learner attitudes might not be quite as radical as it would seem at first.

6.2 RESPONSES DURING TRAINING

Goal-setting

Even after structured guidance on needs analysis, setting adequate learning goals can prove difficult at the initial stages. The most common problem is that learners tend to define extremely broad areas (sometimes a whole major skill such as 'listening') as their goals. The role of the tutor/advisor is crucial at this stage. Learners should be progressively guided to pinpoint exactly what aspects of that skill present greatest problems and, if the problem area is too extensive, to select one particular aspect that could be tackled within the duration of the study programme.

For example, when a vague goal such as 'all aspects of grammar' is initially formulated, the tutor can ask the learner which is the area in which mistakes most typically occur. In this particular case, it turned out to be verb forms, and the goal was easily redefined as 'to learn all regular verb forms of the indicative'. Introducing the verb 'to learn' at the beginning of a statement also contributes to its precision, and it can be useful to prompt learners to begin their goal statements with verbs such as 'to understand', 'to recognise', 'to write', 'to memorise' and so on. Another prompt that can help bring goals into focus is to begin statements with the words 'At the end of this programme, I want to be able to . . .'

At this point, another problem may arise, as some learners state goals that reflect their long-term wishes rather than what can be realistically expected within the duration of the programme. An amusing example was a complete beginner who stated 'I must be able to understand somebody speaking Spanish at normal speed by July 1995' (which was then only five months away, while Spanish represented just a small fraction of this student's total workload). In a case like this, suggesting that the learner goes through all the listening sections of a given coursebook for beginners seemed a more realistic option.

Learners rarely quantify their intended achievement targets spontaneously, and here again, a bit of prompting can help define the goals. 'Improving my vocabulary' could be rephrased as 'to learn 50 words related to current affairs and to use them in context', which then becomes a measurable target. If this step proves quite difficult at first, learners tend to become more specific as the programme progresses (especially once they have had their first test), when they begin to see their goals in terms of observable performances that can be granted a numeric score.

Use of resources

The seven students mentioned in the previous section were asked to state which resources they had been using during the programme. Their answers are summarised in the table below, in which resources are ranked from the most to the least frequently used:

Table 6.1
Number of students using each resource

		Never	*Occasionally*	*Fairly often*	*All the time*
1.	A bilingual dictionary		1	2	4
2.	Your own class notes		1	6	
3.	A Spanish grammar book	1	2	4	
4.	Your course mates	1	2	4	
5.	Your coursebook	1	3	3	
6.	Spanish books (simplified for foreign students)	3	1	2	1
7.	Spanish-speaking friends (for conversation)	1	5		1
8.	Grammar summaries at the end of dictionaries, course books, etc	2	2	3	
9.	Your teacher (for individual consultation)		6	1	
10.	Spanish TV	2	3	2	
11.	Language learning computer programmes	1	5	1	
12.	Spanish-speaking friends (for advice on language)	2	4		1
13.	Spanish magazines/newspapers	1	5	1	
14.	Notes prepared outside class		7		
15.	Spanish videos (original films, documentaries, etc)	3	3	1	
16.	Another coursebook	3	3	1	
17.	Spanish videos (from language courses)	4	1	2	
18.	A monolingual dictionary	5	2		
19.	Spanish books (in original version)	5	2		
20.	Spanish radio	6	1		

These results are purely illustrative, but they do show a group of learners using a wide range of resources to aid their learning. Limited use of the resources at the bottom of the list may be due either to limited availability (probably the case for Spanish radio, which the Language Centre is now trying to make more widely available), or lack of training (learners may simply not know how they can use a monolingual dictionary efficiently). Although this table does not mention the Internet as a possible resource, a later in-house survey carried out at Newcastle University showed that 10 students out of 106 had already used it to consult foreign newspapers, while another 49 students said that they would do it if they were shown how. Learner training seems therefore to have an important part to play in the range of resources that learners decide to use.

Even in the physical absence of a teacher, the choice of resources may be made in response to perceived academic expectations rather than relevance to the learner's

interests. Two students who had decided to practise listening skills using the Spanish news sought advice after a few sessions because they were finding it extremely difficult. It turned out that they were focusing on what they perceived as 'serious' items such as Spanish internal politics, on which they had no background knowledge at all. When asked about their own interests, they admitted little interest for political news at home, while they would normally pay more attention to sports and weather. They seemed surprised to hear that they could do just the same in the foreign language, and from then on they reported greater success in their listening attempts.

Monitoring progress

As seen in the previous chapter (section 5.3) and in the nine examples shown in Appendix 3.1, the tutor had to take a relatively active role in suggesting possible test formats to assess the progress made. Although learners were normally able to produce material that illustrated the ground that had been covered or to state a test topic in terms of general content, they seemed reluctant or unable to take initiatives as to the testing procedure to be followed. This may have been due to the traditional role of teachers as the main (if not the only) authority responsible in matters of assessment; or it may be simply due to lack of familiarity with the options available, another issue to be addressed through learner training.

It was interesting to see a slight improvement in learner-generated test-format suggestions between the first and second testing sessions. For example, case number 9 (Appendix 3.1, chapter 10) shows the second test that was given to a student on French pronouns. In her suggestion for the first test, she had simply written 'personal pronouns', which caused her to perform very poorly as she had failed to realise the wide range of forms that personal pronouns can take in French. After feedback from the tutor and a few more weeks of individual study, her next test request specified 'spotting and explaining examples of personal pronouns in a text'. This time she performed significantly better than on her first test, because her new test request matched exactly the type of skills that she had been developing.

Obtaining proposed marking scales from learners was even more difficult, and in most cases the tutor had to provide task-specific scales after the test (such as those described in section 5.5.1 of chapter 5). Once they were given such tools to assess their performance, learners would readily adopt them and seemed to have little difficulty understanding the proposed criteria after these had been explained to them.

6.3 Learners' evaluation of their own achievement

At the end of the training programme, learners are given an extensive questionnaire in which they evaluate their learning experience in terms of the following criteria:

1. Perceived achievement of the general goals set at the beginning of the programme.
2. Perceived achievement of the specific sub-goals set for each phase of the programme (as stated on their regular progress reports).

3. Relevance of the materials chosen in order to reach those goals.
4. Variety of the materials chosen.
5. Relative weighting of the different tasks performed within each of the tests carried out throughout the programme.
6. Self-awarded score for each of the tests.
7. Students' statement of their greatest achievement during the course.
8. Students' description of themselves as language learners.
9. Description of their proposed strategy for subsequent learning programmes.

A full copy of the questionnaire used in 1996 can be found in Appendix 4.1. In that year, eight learners of French took the learner-training module which comprised two separate phases in which different goals were set. Except in one case (student C), students almost invariably felt that they had been more successful in achieving their second set of targets than their first.

Table 6.2
Achievement of self-set objectives
6 = fully achieved; 4 = mostly achieved; 2 = only partly achieved

Student	*Phase 1*	*Phase 2*
A	4	5
B	4	6
C	4	3
D	5	5
E	4	5
F	3	5
G	3	5
H	4	5

This perceived improvement can also be seen in the numeric scores that they awarded themselves for the first and second test sessions:

Table 6.3
Self-awarded scores

Student	*Test 1*	*Test 2*
A	7	7
B	8	8
C	5	6
D	5.5	8
E	6	6.5
F	2	7.5
G	5.5	7.5
H	6	6

The improvement is particularly noticeable in the case of student F, which was described earlier (page 49) regarding the difficulties that she had in setting her first test on French personal pronouns. Even student C, the only one who felt more successful in reaching his first set of goals than his second (table 6.2), gives himself a higher score on the test corresponding to the second phase. It has to be said that these students knew that examiners would consider self-awarded scores in their general assessment of the learners' performance. Therefore there may have been a tendency to exaggerate the amount of improvement in order to gain higher marks. Problems related to the issue of formal assessment will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.4 EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

The same learners were given another questionnaire seeking their views about the module. The programme, which students took in parallel with a conventional language course, integrated two components: a self-study plan (comprising two phases over a period of 12 weeks) and a student project consisting of an oral presentation on a topic related to their specialist subject (Mechanical Engineering).

6.4.1 General reaction

Table 6.4 summarises the answers given to the module evaluation questionnaire in two successive years (see chapter 1, section 1.2 for further details on these groups):

1996: eight learners of French (post-GCSE), already mentioned in section 6.3

1997: seven learners from different language backgrounds:

- French (post-A-level) 2 students
- Spanish (Elementary) 2 students
- German (post-GCSE) 2 students

The vast majority of them either agreed (8 students) or strongly agreed (4 students) with the statement 'overall, I am happy that I took the module', although the two learners of German in 1997 were the exception (1 'strongly disagree', 1 'neither agree nor disagree').

The relationship that develops between learners and their tutor on this type of course may cause them to be generally positive in their evaluation questionnaires. However, a closer look at their responses to more specific statements reveals a few aspects that are not so popular overall.

If we take the response 'neither agree nor disagree' as a polite way to express what they dislike (an interpretation which is confirmed by some of the comments given later in the questionnaire), we can see that the least popular features are those related to record-keeping (statement 3 in table 6.4 below) and self-assessment (statements 5 and 6). The perceived relevance of these features to purposes other than self-directed learning may be the cause of such lack of enthusiasm. Indeed, those less popular aspects are all features also used by examiners for formal assessment purposes.

Table 6.4
Students' evaluation of the self-instruction programme in 1996 and 1997

	Statements	*Overall response*
1.	I learnt a lot from the self-study programme	Agree
2.	I learnt a lot from the video project	Agree
3.	Keeping a formal record of my progress was useful	Neither
4.	Responsibility for choosing what to study	Agree
5.	Responsibility for choosing form of assessment	Neither / Agree
6.	Being asked what mark to give myself	Neither
7.	The objectives of the module were clear to me	Agree
8.	The teacher helped me enough with difficulties	Agree
9.	The teacher gave me enough feedback	Agree
10.	Course made me more independent as a language learner	Agree

6.4.2 Problems encountered

In the 1997 questionnaires, the two learners of German stand out from the rest of their group as the least satisfied with the module. The problem may have been related to staff training issues. Students learning French and Spanish were advised by the module co-ordinator, a tutor who had been directly involved in designing the module and was well acquainted with the principles underlying learner-directed approach. Given that the module co-ordinator was only competent in French and Spanish, an hourly paid tutor was appointed for German, with a mission to deal only with language-specific aspects of the programme. This format was not anticipated to be problematic in itself, as the module co-ordinator was still expected to offer non language-specific advice to all the students.

In the case of French and Spanish, the distinction between her two roles of non language-specific advisor and language-specific informant soon became difficult to keep up. Besides, learners of these two languages seemed to accept quite well the fact that the same person was carrying out both roles. On the other hand, learners of German were clearly getting less attention, and the German tutor spontaneously began to act as their learning advisor. Unfortunately, she lacked adequate training and adopted a strongly directive, mostly grammar-based approach. For these two students goal-setting was probably perceived as an extrinsic put-off rather than an incentive for greater autonomy.

This example raises a number of issues related to the role of learner trainers as language advisors, especially whether or not they should be. . .

(a) acting as advisors while carrying out actual language teaching;

(b) competent in the language that the learners are studying;

(c) giving advice to learners of languages in which they are competent *as well as* to learners of languages in which they are not competent.

This reaction from the two learners of German also highlights the importance of good teacher training, which will be discussed in chapter 8.

6.4.3 Suggestions for improvement

Students' responses to the question *'How could this module be improved?'* related to the following areas:

1. Time management problems within the module (see planned timetable in appendix 5.1):
   - *'The timing is wrong. Everything was about 1 week too advanced from week 7 onwards.'*
   - *'As it worked out, the timing (. . .) was much more feasible than as timetabled, but the [initial] timetabling seemed somewhat misleading.'*
   - *'Make summary session before the exam period.'*
   - *'More contact hours. Found it difficult otherwise to meet with tutor or partner.'*
2. Clarity of course requirements:
   - *'I was not sure how much work, in terms of quantity, was required for the reports and tests.'*
   - This issue raised particularly strong feelings in one learner of German: *'It would be good to have the requirements of this module clearly outlined right from the start, so we don't get to the end of the module and find out that things we thought were optional were actually compulsory.'*

   Section 7.1 of chapter 7 examines possible solutions to this problem.
3. Length of the training programme:
   - *'Doing it over both semesters to allow students to get used to the format.'*
   - *'Perhaps a third test to cover the material learnt in more detail.'*
4. Amount of contact with tutor for explicit feedback:
   - *'Perhaps more one to one co-operation to identify individual problems.'*
   - *'A bit more individual discussion with the tutor before the tests just to check the work over and ensure that everything was correct as I had a few words and expressions that were not correct.'*
5. Self-assessment:
   - *'Didn't like assessing myself or choosing form of test. Found it hard to mark myself.'*

6. Workload:

   - *'Only one goal for each test'* (in other words: one sub-goal instead of two should be stated on each progress report).
   - The same learner of German who found course requirements unclear complained strongly about the amount of work required on the programme: *'I can see the ideas behind the self-study part of the module, but I feel that it was just too much work and therefore it suffered (. . .) I don't think the full extent of our normal workload was realised, and that we simply don't have the time to devote to this module on top of everything else.'* Perhaps a more sympathetic approach through the stages of goal-setting and monitoring could have alleviated this student's time management problems.

With the exception of this last comment, the remarks made in the final section of the questionnaire: 'other comments' were overwhelmingly positive:

- *'Overall opinion: most enjoyable module this year.'*
- *'I feel the course is very worthwhile from my own personal needs as it has helped me immensely. During semester one I felt very unconfident with my French and my marks [on the conventional language course] were very poor compared to the rest of the class. I now feel much better and this has been reflected in my marks.'*
- *'I enjoyed the module and found that it fitted in well with my other studies, as I could devote time to it when I was able, rather than having set work each week.'*
- *'It should be opened up to a lot more people as it allows one to improve many skills which are not only useful to language learning.'*
- *'I feel it was also useful in other aspects, not just learning the language. It showed how well you could organise yourself, made you more aware of self-analysis, and showed you how you performed in groups.'*

The last two comments clearly show that learners appreciate the transferable nature of some of the skills taught in the learner training programme, which is an encouraging reaction.

7 CONTROLLING STANDARDS

With growing competition and shrinking resources, educational institutions are under great pressure not only to ensure that high quality standards are being reached in the courses that they offer, but also to spell out in full detail what procedures are being used so that such quality standards can be easily monitored.

Higher Education institutions for instance are aware of HEFCE requirements at every stage of course design, delivery, assessment, evaluation and review. Schools are equally concerned about OFSTED inspections, and centres of Further Education have to ensure that they meet set NVQ standards in order to receive adequate funding.

As learner training is becoming more widespread as a common form of instruction, the problem of accreditation becomes an issue if the new courses are to become formal modules, for example as approved components of University degree courses. The main concerns of internal and external assessors are related to customised goal-setting, evidence of the work carried out by learners in private study sessions, and adequacy of the assessment procedures used in the course.

7.1 GOAL-SETTING

The type of course that causes most problems in terms of standardising the requirements for goal-setting is obviously the case of customised programmes. It has been argued that the flexible approach that is adopted in this type of programme may be used by learners to set themselves excessively easy targets, with the excuse that the goals must be achievable. Although not the most frequent, this attitude has been observed in some learners in the past and needs to be prevented. It only becomes a problem when the learner training module becomes a course component that is formally assessed and counts towards a qualification. It could be argued that the principle of learner autonomy is somewhat alienated as soon as compulsory summative assessment is introduced externally (see next chapter), but then again it is the price one has to pay for giving learner training the status it deserves in the curriculum. Formal assessment also has the benefit of keeping learners on target and preventing dropout (see last paragraph of chapter 8).

One way to reassure assessors and external examiners is to set a proficiency test at the beginning of the course and to allocate each learner to a level that is roughly equivalent to one of the levels existing for conventionally taught courses. For instance, if a learner enters the course with a level of proficiency equivalent to the entry level of students on the elementary class, the goals set for this student should be within the difficulty range of the objectives that are set for the taught course of elementary level. Thus, an achievement target such as 'giving my name and address and spelling them out' will be regarded as inappropriate as it would only correspond to a beginner level, while 'describing the holiday I just had' will be regarded as suitable for elementary level, because 'talking about the past' is part of the elementary syllabus. The example on the following page is from a course proposal for a skills-based course (the language learning skills module presented as part of 'phase 6' on pages 4–5).

Diagnosis of language proficiency on arrival (for adequate goal-setting)

In order to define the level of language achievement to be used as target, the following means will be used:

1. A diagnostic test of language proficiency (45 minutes, on students' arrival), covering grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and listening.

2. A brief conversation with the language tutor (5 mins per student, recorded on tape on students' arrival), structured in order to assess the student's level of oral proficiency. Students will also be asked to read out a short passage in order to assess pronunciation according to a standard criterion.

The outcome of the diagnostic test (1 and 2 above) will be the allocation of each student to an appropriate level: beginner, elementary, lower intermediate, upper intermediate, or advanced. On that basis, achievement targets will be selected in accordance to those described in the objectives of conventional language courses taught by the Language Centre at a similar level, using the following aids:

3. An extensive needs analysis questionnaire (completed by the students between weeks 1 and 2).

4. An individual discussion with the language tutor in order to establish a detailed list of achievement targets as explained below (leaning contracts signed on week 3).

If time pressure is too great for implementing this procedure, more economic options can be tried out. For instance, one-to-one interviews for placement purposes could be replaced with a standard speaking test carried out in the language lab. The rest of the diagnostic test could be done using some of the software packages that have been designed for that purpose, perhaps in combination with more traditional placement techniques if a wider range of skills is to be tested.

Before signing a learner contract, the tutor will decide whether the goals being proposed are at an adequate level for the student and request any changes that are necessary to meet level requirements. As all documents are kept in the student's record, external examiners will be able to check that the targets were adequate. If necessary, student test scores and learning contracts could be submitted to a second marker or even to external examiners for approval at the beginning of the course.

The amount of work can also be controlled by means of a list of compulsory task types regarded as minimum requirements. Wherever possible, tasks can be carefully quantified (e.g. a given number of words required for all submitted word lists) in order to ensure that the workload is adequately standardised. The following example is from the same proposal (for details of implementation see chapter 5, section 5.3):

Assessment of language performance

Achievement targets will typically cover the following areas, each of which will account for 10% of the final mark. Students will be requested to submit a final list of proposed materials for assessment by the end of week 6.

1. *Vocabulary:* Students will take a given topic, learn 200 words related to that topic and submit the word list. Assessment will consist of a writing task that requires the correct use of a given number of words taken from the list, in context.

2. *Grammar:* One specific aspect of grammar will be agreed on the basis of weaknesses shown on the diagnostic test (e.g. the use of past tenses in French, German declension forms, use of subjunctive in Spanish, etc). Achievement will be assessed on the basis of the percentage of correct answers given on a structural test.

3. *Listening:* On the basis of the diagnostic test, students will be advised of possible sources of listening material, from which they will choose and prepare 4 recordings (cassettes or language Centre catalogue references to be submitted, as well as tape transcripts when available). Assessment will consist of two listening tasks: one based on prepared material, the other on unseen material of a similar nature.

4. *Speaking:* Students will choose two real-life situations relevant to their needs, and prepare two role-plays. Assessment will be based on their performance on a similar role-play (recorded on tape) with the language tutor, who will introduce unpredicted details to which the student will need to respond. Students having particular problems with pronunciation may replace *one* of the role-plays with a read-aloud task, which will be assessed on the percentage of occurrences of the problematic sound(s) that are correctly pronounced, possibly using the same text as in the diagnostic interview.

5. *Reading:* On the basis of the diagnostic test, students will be advised of possible sources of reading material, from which they will choose and prepare 4 texts (photocopies to be submitted). Assessment will consist of two reading tasks: one based on prepared material, the other one on unseen material of a similar nature.

6. *Writing:* Students will choose two text types relevant to their needs and study the schemata and formulae most commonly used in the genre. Assessment will involve producing one of the two text types according to a set list of parameters. Students having difficulty with a particular sub-skill of writing (embedding clauses, finding alternative synonyms to commonly used words, using punctuation, etc) may substitute one of the text types with extra work on the relevant sub-skill. In these cases, assessment will consist of re-writing a text using the given technique a certain number of times.

Here again, other approaches are possible, as this example is from a module entirely devoted to learner training. In cases where learner training is only one component within a conventional course, the same principle can be adopted on a smaller scale, perhaps focusing only on one or two skills, reducing the number of compulsory requirements or providing the learners with a set of selected material from which they can choose. The few examples described in chapter 5 show how this type of assessment can be implemented in practice.

7.2 RECORD KEEPING

Given that it is the process of learning to learn that is principally being assessed, rather than the actual product of learning (i.e. performance on language tests), it is essential to gather as much tangible evidence as possible from the learning process.

Work carried out by learners in their private study sessions should be accurately reported in the progress reports, and supporting evidence provided by students' notes and personal records. Assessment tests are also directly related to the work learners claim to have done, and this should ensure that they actually do what they claim to be doing. It is important, however, to return any relevant notes to the learners once these documents have been examined. Retaining them would deprive learners of the control they have been granted throughout the programme. Hours of personal work could be perceived as rather pointless if all records of peoples' efforts were permanently taken away from them.

Other documents that can assist examiners in their task are learner contracts, fully completed progress reports, and of course copies of any tests that are carried out during the programme. If the tests have oral components, taped learner performances should also be attached.

If learners are involved in assessing their own work, they should be asked to include their own marking schemes in the dossier (or any marking schemes presented to them by their tutor/advisor), as well as any self-assessment questionnaire given during the course and any other document in which they evaluate the experience of learning to learn.

The following checklist is an example of the set of documents that would constitute a typical dossier for a twelve-week course comprising two progress reports and assessment sessions:

- Learning contract
- Report no. 1
- Supporting material for report no. 1
- Test no. 1
- Test 1 follow-up
- Report no. 2
- Supporting material for report no. 2
- Test no. 2
- Test 2 follow-up
- Self-evaluation questionnaire (for assessment purposes)
- Marking scales used in tests 1 and 2
- Module evaluation questionnaire (*not* for assessment!)
- Any other relevant material

On training programmes with large numbers of learners, it may be necessary to set aside one session to go through the documents required and to allow learners a few days to tidy up their dossiers, supply any missing documents and fill up any missing information. A checklist can be given to ensure that nothing is left out, and a given format may also be prescribed (for instance stating the order in which documents

should appear and be labelled) in order to facilitate the work of examiners. A few extra marks could even be awarded for presentation as an incentive.

7.3 ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Assessment is probably the most controversial point when it comes to obtaining institutional approval for a new learner training course. There is indeed a fundamental contradiction in trying to assess externally the level of autonomy that a particular student has achieved. By definition, a truly autonomous learner does not require any authority to state that he or she has indeed reached autonomous status! Yet there is a compromise that we need to accept if a learner training programme is to be taken as seriously as any other conventional course leading towards a final qualification. Unfortunately, it is not common practice to take the learners' word for it, and given the shortcomings of human nature, learners themselves are probably not ready either for such an open system, especially when their future careers may depend on the grades that they obtain in the end.

But what exactly should we be assessing in this type of course? As was pointed out in chapter 2 (section 2.1), three aspects of learner performance need to be assessed:

1. The ability to set adequate goals.
2. The ability to choose adequate means in order to achieve these goals.
3. The ability to assess one's own performance and monitor the progress made.

If all these skills are present, good performance on the self-set tests should result. Therefore it seems fair that the final product of the learner's work (i.e. the scores obtained on these tests) ought to have a fairly high weighting in the overall mark given to each student. As learners themselves have been trained to assess their own performance, self-awarded scores should also be taken into account and, where reasonably possible, be accepted without major changes by the examiners. This is of course only possible if the marking scales used by the students are sufficiently valid and reliable to be accepted by a third party. If they are not, it could mean that self-assessment skills still need to improve, and in that case the examiners would use their discretion to decide on a more appropriate score. The grey area resulting from terms such as 'where *reasonably* possible' or '*sufficiently* valid and reliable' can be avoided if tutors ensure that no self-set test proposed by a student in a progress report can go ahead unless a clear set of marking criteria is agreed as well. This should be part of the learning process, as it forces the learner to be very specific when defining newly acquired skills.

An example of the type of tasks that might constitute an appropriate basis for performance assessment is shown in the list of skills-based course requirements given on page 57. For this particular example, it was earlier explained that language performance would represent 60% of the total mark for the course (10% for each skill). The remaining 40% would then be awarded on the basis of the candidates' progress in terms of learning autonomy, split up in the following way:

Assessment of learner autonomy

Two documents will be used in order to assess the students' degree of autonomy:

1. A learner diary, which will be assessed on the following criteria:
   - Goal-setting
   - Means used
   - Monitoring strategies

   } 20% of final mark
2. A final evaluation of the learning experience (2000 words) 20% of final mark

Assessment procedure

Assessment consists of a submitted written dossier and a short written test, followed by a brief interview with the examiners. The written test and interview will be used to help examiners assess the amount of original work put into the dossier, which carries the full weighting of the final mark.

1. **Submitted dossier**

   Students are required to produce a dossier in the foreign language, based on their research on a given topic. Students are encouraged to choose a topic that is related to their own discipline, but this is not an absolute requirement. *[The length of the dossier should be between 2000 and 3000 words of original text, excluding appendices and other documents.]* It should show evidence of research involving some form of contact with the target country (interviews with native speakers, use of the Internet, contacts with foreign companies, etc). Students are allowed to seek help from native speakers, but must ensure that they are competent enough to carry out the other two components of the assessment by themselves. The project supervisor may point out mistakes on one draft and give advice on general language problems, but language accuracy in the final version is the responsibility of students themselves.

2. **Written question related to topic** *[30 minutes]*

   The point of this exercise (carried out as a class test at the end of the course) is to ensure that the student's level of writing skills on the topic is genuine and corresponds more or less to the level recorded in the dossier, regardless of the amount of external help received during the writing process. The student's answer *[no less than 200 words]* will be attached to the submitted dossier.

3. **Discussion with examiners based on dossier: questions related to content and language learning strategies used** *[15 minutes]*.

   The examiners will adjust the depth and pace of this discussion to the students' level of language proficiency. They will not be assessing expertise on the topic itself, but merely the presence of adequate language tools and skills to cope with a discussion on the topic at the required level. Students should also be able to explain *[in English]* how they tackled the task in terms of language learning and problem-solving strategies.

The second example above explains the assessment procedure for the project-based course described in chapter 2 (section 2.4). Italicised text in square brackets indicates details that were added in order to satisfy specific requests from the Board of Studies, and illustrates the Board's concern for explicit quantification of each of the tasks required.

As an illustration of how the marks can be broken up into more narrowly defined sets of criteria, let us examine another example, taken from the integrated programme described in section 2.5 of chapter 2. The two integrated components of this course were:

1. A customised self-study programme (weighting: 40% of the final mark)
2. A project, consisting of an oral presentation on a semi-technical topic, recorded on video (weighting: 30% for preparatory work; 30% for oral performance).

And this is the marking form that was approved by the Board of Studies:

LCZ198 EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PROJECT II

Assessment procedure

In order to encourage learner autonomy, student's self-assessment scores in certain areas will be taken into consideration by the examiners (see below).

- **Self-study programme**

Criteria	*Student's score*	*Marker's score*	*Out of*
1. Achievement of language objectives (performance on agreed assessment tasks: 2 tests in class)	.....	.....	20
2. New language learning techniques tried out from set study guide (as reported on task evaluation forms provided)	N/A	.....	8
3. Relevance and variety of self-set tasks and chosen materials (student's self-evaluation sought in questionnaire)	.....	.....	8
4. Quality of documentation	N/A	.....	4
Total	**N/A**	**.....**	**40**

- **Project preparation**

Criteria	*Student's score*	*Marker's score*	*Out of*
1. Clarity of explanation in final version of script	N/A	.....	5
2. Detailed analysis of all revisions performed on successive versions of the script (with regard to content, structure, vocabulary, morphology, syntax and style as appropriate)	N/A	.....	15
3. Supporting materials (with regard to strategic value, clarity and relevance, accuracy of all language written, and visual appeal as appropriate)	N/A	.....	10
Total	**N/A**	**.....**	**30**

continued

LCZ198 EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PROJECT II (continued)

- **Project presentation**

	Student	*Marker*	*Out of*
1. Comprehensibility of the gist	.....	.....	6
2. Fluency	.....	.....	6
3. Accuracy	.....	.....	6
4. Production/presentation skills	.....	.....	6
5. Use of supporting material	.....	.....	6
Total	.....	.....	**30**

In this scheme, some of the criteria are only assessed by the examiners, for instance the project preparation, while aspects that are directly related to language performance are assessed by both the learner and the examiners.[11] Scores awarded by learners are only consultative, but are normally taken into serious consideration. Indeed, they are hardly ever significantly different from the scores awarded by examiners, given that the marking scales used are the same most of the time. Task-specific marking scales are discussed in section 5.6 of chapter 5.

11. Full details of the marking scale used by students and examiners to assess the project presentation in this example are given in appendix 3.4 (chapter 10).

8 A FEW QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

A number of questions emerge from the issues discussed in previous chapters. This final chapter addresses three of them: the first one is purely practical and concerns the mode of delivery of this type of learner-centred training. A few possible options for simplifying procedures are suggested. The second section examines the issue of teacher training in the light of the new skills required from language learning instructors/advisors. Finally, the last section re-assesses the principle of learner autonomy within the framework of formally assessed degree modules.

8.1 STREAMLINING THE SYSTEM

One typical question that teachers ask when procedures such as those described in previous chapters are introduced to them is 'how long does it take you to prepare each session?'. One possible answer would be 'not too long if you are well trained'. We shall come back to the issue of teacher training in the next section. A second possible answer would be 'not too long if you are well organised'. There are various ways in which the system can be streamlined, all of them based on the same principle: to set up standard procedures wherever possible in order to keep ad-hoc support to a minimum, while making sure that every individual still finds appropriate guidance. The examples listed below show a few attempts in this direction. Nevertheless, the programmes described in this book still rely very much on the tutors' dedication and managing skills. It is hoped that efficiency will be improving over time as new solutions are developed.

Placement tests: In section 7.1 of the previous chapter, it was suggested that such tests could be computer-based in order to save time.

Time management: In a programme where each student may be doing a different thing, it is essential that everybody knows exactly when things are happening, and the best way to ensure this is to give all relevant deadlines in writing at the beginning of the programme. If necessary, any minor changes could then easily be announced through the agreed communication channels (such as e-mail). Appendix 5.1 (chapter 10) shows the type of information that could be included in the course schedule.

Goal-setting sessions: The use of standard questionnaires should ensure that most areas are covered adequately. Tutors may decide to adapt the lists of sub-skills to their most typical student profile. The one-to-one sessions in which contracts are signed could be replaced by tutorials. In groups where the level of proficiency is relatively homogeneous and there is little time for negotiation, learners may be given an extensive list of 'ready-made' goals from which they can choose the most appropriate to their needs. Learners could even be asked to combine one goal from a given 'list A' (goals focusing on accuracy) with one goal from 'list B' (goals focusing on communication), or any other suitable combination to ensure a good balance of skills.

Choosing the means: In chapter 4 (section 4.2) a list of useful materials to have in a resource centre was given. In particular, good study guides can save the tutors a lot of time and effort when presenting new learning strategies (section 4.5), as well as a bank of useful addresses (ideally on the Internet), such as tourist offices, foreign universities and companies, etc, to which learners can be referred (section 4.3). It is also important to ensure effective communication channels (electronic or conventional) among the participants.

Monitoring progress: It is important to include suggestions on how to monitor progress for each new strategy that is presented in the study guides. The amount of negotiation required when setting achievement tests can also be reduced by providing a limited list of possible test formats from which learners could choose (chapter 5, section 5.3) as well as ready-made marking schemes. It also helps less experienced tutors who would otherwise have to create from scratch a different test for each student.

Formal assessment: It is difficult to keep the paperwork to a minimum while ensuring that sufficient evidence is gathered to support any judgements made. It can be quite difficult for an assessor other than the students' tutor to work out which of the documents in a students' file are self-study notes, which are achievement tests, which are summaries of recordings submitted on an audio tape, and so on. Trivial as it may seem, adequate labelling of such documents according to standard guidelines can make the assessors' task a lot easier.

8.2 What does a learner trainer need to know?

Teachers may feel initially uncomfortable – even threatened[12] – in their new position as learner trainers. The changing role of the teacher towards a learner-centred approach requires a range of new skills. Dickinson[13] stresses the importance of psychological preparation and gives a list of basic skills that the new self-instruction 'helper' should have. All of these skills proved to be relevant in the learner-training programmes described in previous chapters of this book.

The learner's mother tongue: Students on the learner training programme would generally prefer to discuss matters of learning strategies in English, especially those with low levels of proficiency.

The target language: Whether or not learner trainers and advisors should be competent in the target language is still a controversial issue. In our experience, attempts by a non German-speaking trainer to advise the learners of German in 1996–97 proved unsuccessful (section 6.4, chapter 6). It could of course be argued that the three functions that were being carried out by one person (language teaching, learner training and advising) should have been more clearly differentiated from the outset.

12. For a discussion of the factors that cause insecurity, see T. Luxon, 'The psychological risks for teachers at a time of methodological change', *Teacher Trainer*, 8/1 (1994):6–9.

13. L. Dickinson, *Self-Instruction in Language Learning*, Cambridge University Press (1987):122–125.

Needs analysis: Learner-trainers need to be able to adapt needs analysis questionnaires to their group of learners and help them identify all the sub-skills involved in the skills that they wish to acquire.

Setting objectives: Adequate guidance proved essential at this stage and is a crucial aspect of any learner training programme (see sections 3.4 and 6.2 of chapters 3 and 6).

Linguistic analysis: When presented with input materials chosen by a learner, the helper should be able to analyse linguistic features that are particularly relevant to that learner's goals and guide her to focus on these (e.g. when selecting a particular group of words out of a student's word list for a vocabulary test, as explained in section 5.3 of chapter 5). This argument would support the recommendation that advisors ought to be competent in the target language.

Materials: Dickinson points out that this entails not only direct advice to learners on what they can use (which was sought by our students on many occasions), but also ensuring that the resource centre's stock of materials is kept up to date. Here again, a helper who is also a teacher of the target language is more likely to be familiar with the resources available for that particular language.

Materials preparation: This refers obviously to worksheets based on specific materials, but it should also mean training learners on how to prepare their own (as for the gap-filling preparation described in section 4.5) and designing study guides.

Assessment procedures: This aspect is all the more relevant in a learner training programme because the learners have to be trained to assess themselves explicitly. The whole of chapter 5 illustrates the importance of having fully trained learner trainers in this area.

Learning strategies: In one of the modules described, the students were asked to try out at least three strategies that were new to them (e.g. creating their own role-play cue cards). Throughout the programme the learner trainer would help learners evaluate the success of the strategies used and suggest alternative ones if necessary.

Management and administration: As explained in the first section of this chapter, this is an essential skill if the programme is to succeed. The more flexible the options are, the more carefully managed the whole operation must be in order to prevent failure due to practical problems.

Librarianship: Some cataloguing skills are required from learner trainers as they should be closely involved in the on-going task of making resources accessible to the learners and improving information retrieval channels.

In addition to the skills listed by Dickinson, learner-trainers should also have. . .

Knowledge of the students' curriculum: When students come from a growing number of different departments, effective needs analysis can only be achieved if matters such as the relative importance of language instruction within their curriculum, their general workload, foreign placement prospects, etc are known to the learner trainer.

Course development: Rapidly changing needs require fast response in the form of new training programmes, which must be carefully designed to meet high quality requirements.

Pastoral skills: As the advice to learners becomes more personalised, learner trainers will sometimes have to deal with non-academic factors affecting performance and should be able to advise the students accordingly. Learners may also react emotionally to learning problems, and trainers who are able to notice these (often subtle) reactions can help by promoting a positive attitude.

Finally, the learner trainer needs to come to terms with a phenomenon that can otherwise cause considerable anxiety. David Little[14] puts is very nicely, as he stresses that teachers themselves need to learn to be 'autonomous' and to accept their teaching as a learning experience: 'once the teacher relinquishes control it is impossible for him or her not to recognise how messy and indeterminate most learning is – and impossible to escape the insecurities and uncertainties that such recognition brings'.

8.3 Balancing formal assessment and learner autonomy

From the moment a learner training programme becomes part of the formally assessed components of a course, one significant drawback needs to be considered: resorting to external assessors in order to establish whether or not a student has reached the status of autonomous learner is to some extent in contradiction with the very principle of autonomy. There is no easy answer to this problem. The best solution so far has been to try to achieve a reasonable balance between the need to allow the students sufficient freedom to become autonomous learners, and the need to assess the results in a fair and reliable way.

The problem lies in the double (and perhaps incompatible) purpose of assessment in the modules that have been described: on the one hand, it is an essential part of the formative process by which students are learning to monitor their own progress through the learning experience; on the other hand, it becomes summative at the end of the module, when tutors are eventually required to give each student a mark that can affect his or her final grades. How then could this contradiction be avoided?

A first option could be to suppress formal assessment altogether by making learner training modules non-compulsory options. They could for instance take the form of skills-based workshops in which the students learn skills that can later be applied to tackle the course requirements of other (formally assessed) modules. The risk in this case could be a high dropout rate, unless the training was perceived as virtually indispensable to succeed in assessed modules. After all, IT skills (such as the use of computers for word-processing) have become a common expectation in a wide range of subjects, and the same could happen to language learning skills as the international dimension of certain degrees becomes more important.

14. D. Little, 'Learning as dialogue: the dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy', *System*, 23/2 (1995):183–194.

The second option would be to integrate the training within the broader framework of an assessed course. A project-based example of this could be the courses for non-language specialists taught in Newcastle University between 1992 and 1994,[15] where the oral presentation project was a compulsory part of the general language course. At the time, the project component was simply assessed on the basis of the final product (learners' performance in delivering the talk), while the strategies leading to it were not formally assessed.

Customised learner training programmes could also be offered by language centres outside the university curriculum, or in FE colleges and centres for adult education in preparation for external examinations. For example, the Spanish group on a learner training module could comprise three students preparing for GCSE, two students preparing for one of the Institute of Linguists' Advanced Certificate modules, and another student preparing for the Diploma Superior of the Spanish Ministry of Education. Their individual goals would be set in order to meet the requirements of the different examinations that they were to take. This set-up would preserve the formative nature of the monitoring process, while summative assessment would focus only on the final product and be carried out by an external body.

In all the options described above, formal assessment is only carried out on the basis of final linguistic performance. Yet the focus of learner training is on *how* such performance can be achieved. None of the solutions proposed so far fully addresses the issue of assessing the learning process. Perhaps the most consistent alternative would indeed include only formative assessment, largely carried out autonomously by learners themselves.

Unfortunately, course components that lack summative assessment are easily neglected by university students when pressure from assessed modules becomes greater. Except for the exceptionally motivated, a typical Engineering student finds it very difficult to keep up regular language work throughout the whole academic year, unless it 'counts' towards the final degree mark. Choosing to enrol on a learner training module can in that respect be regarded as a free decision to ensure the level of discipline required (an autonomous strategy in itself). It is also a way of allowing learner training the time it deserves by acknowledging the workload within the global modular weighting for the year.

The arguments discussed in this chapter show just how complex the issues raised by learner training programmes in higher education can be. The view supported in this book is that, overall, there seems to be a benefit in offering learner training programmes as formally assessed degree modules in universities. However, many questions remain to be answered in the light of future developments, especially regarding role distribution among the different kinds of helpers who support the learning process: teachers, learner trainers and language advisors. The status of formal assessment in learner training also seems to require closer consideration if a larger number of universities is to set up similar programmes in future. As explained in chapter 1, this is only one example that has been described in some detail in the hope that lessons can be learned from it.

15. Referred to as 'phase 2' in chapter 1, section 1.2.

9 REFERENCES

9.1 BOOKS AND ARTICLES

9.1.1 For teachers

- Broady, E. & Kenning, M-M. (eds) (1996) *Promoting Learner Autonomy in University Language Teaching,* CILT.
  An up-to-date collection of academic articles focusing on university students. Many of the studies are based on empirical research, and learner trainers may find some of the case-studies inspiring.

- Dickinson, L. (1987) *Self-Instruction in Language Learning,* CUP.
  A good starting point for those who are new to learner-training. It provides an excellent overview of self-instruction, covering both theoretical and practical issues.

- Fernández-Toro, M. (1997) Subject-specific video projects for beginners, *Language Learning Journal,* September 1997:40–45.
  This article describes the different steps of a project-based learner training programme, explaining how these can be adapted to cover a range of specialist subjects and proficiency levels.

- Gathercole, I. (ed.) (1990) *Autonomy in Language Learning,* CILT.
  A practical collection of articles on implementing independent-learning elements within a class framework.

- Holec, H. (1979) *Autonomy for Language Learning,* Pergamon.
  A seminal book in its time, still regularly quoted in the literature.

- Sheerin, S. (1989) *Self-Access (Resource Books for Teachers),* OUP.
  A collection of practical recipes for implementing self-directed learning (often taking the classroom as a starting point). The introductory chapters provide sound advice on how to get started.

- Wenden, A. (1991) *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy,* Prentice Hall.
  This book is aimed at teachers wishing to develop strategy training in order to promote learner autonomy. Specific tasks are suggested to the readers in order to develop the skills required. Chapter 9 presents six case studies, giving interesting details on the procedures that were used.

9.1.2 For learners

- Doyle, T. & Meara, P. (1991) *Lingo! How to Learn a Language,* BBC.
  Written for the learners in a very accessible style, this little book encourages them to try out a range of language learning strategies. Examples from different languages (including less commonly taught ones) are examined in a reader-friendly style that should tease the learner's curiosity. Unfortunately, the book is currently out of print.

- Ellis, G. & Sinclair, B. (1989) *Learning to Learn English.* A Course in Learner Training. Cambridge University Press.
  A structured learner-training course, comprising a student workbook, an audio cassette and a teacher's book. Chapters focus on the four skills, grammar and vocabulary. Although it is designed for EFL learners, the activities can easily be adapted for other languages.

- Fernández-Toro, M. & Jones, F. (in preparation) *DIY Techniques for Language learners,* CILT.
  This study-guide is designed according to the principles outlined in chapter 4 (section 4.5). It offers an explanation of the sub-skills involved in each of the major skills, as well as an extensive collection of teach-yourself techniques covering the full range of skills. Each entry comprises three sections: strategy's rationale and uses, step-by-step directions, and means of self-assessment.

- Little, D. & Devitt, S.(1991) *Authentik – The User's Guide.* Authentik Language Learning Resources Ltd.
  Designed to accompany the monthly collection of authentic newspaper and radio materials *Authentik,* this study guide is a good introduction for learners who want to understand how languages are learnt. Obviously, it also gives practical advice on how to use *Authentik* for self-instruction.

9.2 COURSEWARE SUITABLE FOR SELF-INSTRUCTION

Only three highly popular series published in the UK will be discussed below, although there are obviously many other courses on the market.

- The *BBC* regularly updates its course materials in order to meet the changing needs of the public. BBC courses are widely used for self-study because of the amount of learner support they provide. The good quality of accompanying video materials is also a popular feature.

- Macmillan's *Breakthrough* is another popular series, based mostly on scripted or semi-scripted dialogues presented in a carefully controlled progression. CD-ROM versions have recently been produced for some of the courses, a medium that is particularly popular for self-study.

- Hodder & Stoughton's *Teach Yourself* series offers course books for a wide range of languages. Some of them have now been re-written taking into account modern approaches to language learning, although many of the courses follow a fairly grammar-based approach. This is not necessarily a bad thing as some learners may feel more comfortable in a highly structured framework.

9.3 Sources of authentic materials

9.3.1 Newspapers and magazines

- Subscriptions to the major European newspapers and magazines can be obtained from *European Schoolbooks Ltd.*, The Runnings, Cheltenham, GL51 9PQ. Phone (01242) 245252. Fax (01242) 224137. Direct subscription to some publications is also possible by credit card through the Internet.

- The *World Wide Web* provides access to a number of foreign newspapers from all around the world (see list of Internet addresses below).

- *Authentik* is a monthly collection of authentic materials for German, Spanish and French. It comprises press articles with suggested activities as well as audio cassettes with selected radio programmes. There is also a new series based on the same principle for learners at GCSE level: *La Cometa* (Spanish), *Etincelle* (French) and *Katapult* (German). Authentik Language Resources Ltd (27 Westland Square, Dublin 2, Ireland) is a campus company associated with Trinity College, Dublin.

9.3.2 Foreign radio programmes

- *Authentik* (see above) comprises a monthly selection of radio programmes. These are very popular among the learners because the materials include a full transcript of all the recordings. Topics are chosen to be up-to-date, yet with a shelf life of at least a couple of months. Simpler collections (suitable for GCSE level) based on the same principle are also available from the same publisher under the titles of *La Cometa* (Spanish), *Etincelle* (French) and *Katapult* (German).

- *Satellite radio* is broadcasted using the same channels as television. The monthly magazine *What Satellite TV* contains a section entitled 'Complete guide to Euro channels', which consists of a 10-page table with full details of radio and television frequencies. Most radio stations listed are permanently available from the same settings as the corresponding television channels as on the example entry shown below:

Satellite	*Television channel*	*Radio channel*
• Eutelsat Hot Bird 1 (13°E)	• TV5 *(followed by frequency details and other technical information, plus a description of the channel's programmes and whether they are encrypted or not)*	• France Info • Fance Inter • France Culture • Swiss Radio Int'l *(each followed by frequency details and other technical information plus a description of the channel's programmes)*

All you have to do is select the television channel (French-speaking channel TV5 in this example) and then press the 'audio' or 'radio' button on your satellite receiver to access the radio stations (in this particular case four different radio stations are using the same satellite channel: just press the 'audio' button again to change station). When you are on 'audio' setting, the television picture can generally still be seen, but the sound comes from the corresponding radio station instead of the television soundtrack. If you find this discrepancy between sound and picture distracting, you can turn the screen's brightness right down to eliminate the picture. Even channels on which the television signal is scrambled may carry clear audio signals.

9.3.3 Foreign television programmes

- The magazine *What Satellite TV* is one of the most comprehensive sources of information for non-professionals in the UK. *Frequencies and broadcasting times* may change from time to time and new satellites and channels are constantly appearing. Channels in the most commonly taught European languages (French, Spanish, German, Italian) can be received with a single fixed dish equipped with a twin LNB. This economical set up is able to pick up all channels from both Hot Bird and Astra satellite clusters. Other foreign languages that can be received in the clear using this set up are Polish, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish. Cantonese and Japanese channels are also available in the clear at certain times.

- Printed *programme schedules* for foreign TV channels are difficult to obtain and often incomplete. The simplest way to find out what is on is to look up the relevant Teletext on the corresponding channel. If your television set has got a remote control with teletext, the same remote control should give you access to foreign teletext. Simply tune in the required channel and press the Teletext button on the remote control. Most satellite channels (though not all) display their programme schedules on teletext. Some even have subtitles for the deaf on certain programmes (the equivalent to British Cefax subtitles on 888). Another quick way to obtain information on frequencies and up-to-date programme schedules is through the Internet (see addresses below). This may be the only medium available in some cases, especially for channels which don't carry teletext information.

- *Less commonly taught languages* can be more difficult to receive on satellite TV. However, as the Internet is becoming powerful enough to carry video signals with improving quality, it should soon be possible to have access to foreign television (e.g. films and news programmes) through this medium. For instance, Korean news (with full transcripts) can be accessed from *http://www.mbc.co.kr.* Further information on foreign television through the Internet is available from the sites listed in section 9.4 below.

9.4 The Internet

Given the dynamic nature of the medium, Web sites may change relatively often. The following list was last checked before this book went into print. If any of the sites is no longer available, it should still be relatively easy to find a similar one using *Lingu@NET* as a starting point. In case of any problems in finding *Lingu@NET,* contact CILT through the conventional channels (20 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4LB).

The following sites may be useful:

- http://www.linguanet.org.uk – *Lingu@NET* is a Web site for language teachers run by CILT and BECTa, offering information on sources of learning materials, forthcoming conferences, teacher development issues, and current research. It is a good starting point for those who are new to the Web's language teaching applications.

- http://www.livjm.ac.uk/language/ – *The World Language Pages.* This site is run by Liverpool Moores University. Information is organised alphabetically by languages. Once a language is selected, a range of links is offered covering the main newspapers in the relevant language, general information about the language, self-administered tests, literature, other texts, software, learning materials, dictionaries, mail lists, audio files, news groups, etc. The way in which links are structured makes this a a user-friendly entry point for students searching information related to a particular country.

- http://www.eurotv.com/ – *EuroTV* gives up-to-date information on satellite television daily schedules for the main European channels.

- http://www.buttle.com/tv/schedule.htm – *TV Schedules of the World.* For channels not covered by EuroTV. This service is more comprehensive, yet not as user-friendly as EuroTV.

- http://www.tcd.ie/CLCS/tandem/index.html – *International Tandem Network* is a network of institutions who pair up their students with students from the relevant foreign country so that they can collaborate in learning each other's language (tandem learning). The site is run by Trinity College, Dublin.

- http://www.hull.ac.uk/cti – *The CTI Centre for Modern Languages* at the University of Hull aims to promote the use of computers in language teaching and learning. This important web-site provides up-to -date information about a large number of courses and also offers critical reviews of teaching materials.

- http://www.hull.ac.uk./langinst/plan – *Professional Language Advisors' Network (PLAN)*, run by the University of Hull: with the growing development of open access resource centres in many institutions, the role of language advisors is beginning to be regarded as essential. This is a forum for exchanging experiences and developing a general framework for this new generation of language professionals.

10 APPENDICES

What do I need to learn?

Fill in these four tables and you'll find out

Difficulty					Relevance		
Very easy	*Relatively easy*	*A bit difficult*	*Very difficult*	*Impossible*	*Not relevant*	*Second priority*	*Top priority*
0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2

	Reading	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	General notices in transports, shops, etc.								
	Bills and forms to fill in for agencies, administrations, etc.								
	General information (courses, accommodation, regulations, etc)								
	Restaurant menus								
	User manuals for household appliances								
	Hand-written letters and notes from French friends								
	Formal letters								
	Film subtitles in French								
	Newspapers and magazines								
	Fiction								
	Readings for my specialist subject (course books, etc)								
	Comic strips								
	Memos and reports on familiar subject								
	Lecture notes from French students								
	Exam questions								

	Writing	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	Writing cheques, paying bills, filling in standard forms								
	Writing short messages, notices, etc.								
	Writing informal letters								
	Writing formal letters								
	Writing memos on familiar topics at work								
	Writing a report								
	Writing simple operating instructions								
	Writing the answer to an exam question								
	Writing an article for a newsletter								
	Writing my CV								
	Writing an essay on current issues								

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	Listening	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	Understanding directions (in the street)								
	Understanding standard announcements in stations, shops, etc.								
	Understanding shop assistants (clothes, food, etc)								
	Understanding spoken menus from busy waiters								
	Dealing with bank officers, estate agents, administrators, etc.								
	Understanding French friends (one to one)								
	Understanding French friends (in a group at party, pub, etc)								
	Talking on the phone								
	Watching TV: news and documentaries								
	Watching TV: film and drama								
	Understanding actors at the theatre								
	Understanding simple jokes								
	Understanding lectures								
	Understanding mild regional accents								
	Understanding directions in a working environment (e.g. lab)								

	Speaking	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	Speaking the language with good pronunciation and intonation								
	Ordering drinks and meals								
	Getting my shopping done (in small, local shops)								
	Finding, visiting and discussing accommodation								
	Registering for a course								
	Buying tickets, enquiring about timetables, etc								
	Talking to French friends (one to one)								
	Talking to French friends (in a group at party, pub, etc)								
	Talking on the phone								
	Working in a French environment								
	Summarise a lecture for a friend who wasn't there								
	Talking in seminars								
	Giving a presentation								
	Taking a job interview								
	Taking an oral examination in my subject								
	Having a polite argument								
	Telling a joke								
	What are the most predictable topics that you will be talking about with French friends? ***(write a list below)***								

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	Grammaire	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	Le présent de l'indicatif (verbes réguliers)								
	Le présent de l'indicatif (verbes irréguliers)								
	Le futur de l'indicatif								
	Le passé composé: formation *(nous sommes allés, tu as fait)*								
	Le passé composé: usage								
	L'accord du participe passé								
	L'imparfait de l'indicatif *(il allait)*								
	Le plus-que-parfait *(j'étais allée)*								
	Le subjonctif *(il faut qu'il fasse attention)*								
	Le conditionnel *(Je voudrais une baguette)*								
	L'impératif *(Fais attention! Ne bois pas trop!)*								
	L'accord des adjectifs								
	L'usage des articles *(le, un, du, de la, etc)*								
	Les adjectifs et pronoms possessifs *(mon, la sienne . . .)*								
	L'usage des adjectifs et pronoms possessifs *(celui-là . . .)*								
	L'accord du verbe avec le sujet								
	Les pronoms personnels *(leur, lui, la, me, nous, se, etc)*								
	Ecrire / dire les nombres (décimaux, fractions, etc)								
	Reconnaître les nombres (quand vous les écoutez)								
	Conjonctions de coordination *(mais, ou, or, car, ni, et donc)*								
	Négation *(ne plus, ni . . . ni . . ., etc)*								
	Raconter une histoire au passé								
	La ponctuation								

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	Topics for vocabulary	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	Talking about yourself								
	Describing a house: rooms and furniture								
	Directions, locating things in space								
	Days of the week, months. Today, tomorrow, etc.								
	Telling the time								
	Food & drink								
	Clothes								
	Physical descriptions of people								
	Psychological descriptions								
	Describing objects: shape, size, material, use, etc.								
	Weather								
	Money								
	Body & health								
	Travel								
	Sport								
	Education								
	Work								
	Favourite music								
	Literature & performing arts								
	Technical topics								
	Current issues								

	Culture et civilisation	Difficulty					Relevance to my needs		
	Tick as appropriate (see codes above) →	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2
	Géographie, tourisme et traditions								
	Histoire								
	Politique								
	Economie								
	Education								
	Technologie								
	Culture								
	Sport								
	Mode								
	Gastronomie								
	Jeunesse								
	Société								
	France								
	Belgique								
	Suisse								
	Canada								
	Autres pays francophones (Afrique, Amérique)								

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University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Language Centre

Language Project: self-study plan

Learning Contract

Student's name ..... Language .....

My main priorities for this semester are:

	Skill	My goal
1		
2		
3		

What I intend to do in order to achieve these goals

1	
2	
3	

I understand that I must produce two complete self-study reports during this semester and that I will be tested on the basis of such reports. I will also try out at least three new study techniques of my choice.

Date *Student's signature* *Tutor's signature*

....

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University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Language Centre

Language Project: self-study plan

Self-Study Report

Student's name ..... Language .....

Date started ..... Set completion date .....

Set goals for this set of work:

1 .....

2 .....

Date	Materials used	Work done	Time spent	Comments

Please attach a second form when the table is full

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Student's suggestions for assessment

Please tick a box below (two boxes if two skills are to be assessed) and circle the type of task that is suggested.

	Focus of testing	Type of task suggested
☐	A word list / a set of phrases	re-use in writing / re-use orally / re-use in a gap-filling exercise made by the student (10 items minimum) / made by the teacher / taken from a book
☐	Grammar form / grammar rule	drill made by student / drill taken from a book / drill set by teacher / using the rule in a set piece of writing / spotting and explaining examples in a text
☐	Communicating in a typical situation	Suggested setting for role-play
☐	A particular recording / a particular type of recording	Listening comprehension questions / questions on vocabulary and phrases used / copying the speakers' pronunciation / note-taking
☐	A particular text / a particular type of text	Listening comprehension questions / questions on vocabulary and phrases used / reading aloud / saying by heart (poems, songs, etc) / filling gaps / rearranging paragraphs / translating from / back into the foreign language
☐	A particular topic	For speaking / for writing / for listening / for reading
☐	Other	.....

Attached materials to be used for testing

Please attach any relevant materials as appropriate (text, word list, role-play description, copy or reference of the tape to be used, etc) and give any details that may be relevant to the person testing you.

What marking criteria would you like to use? (please attach suggested scoring system if necessary)

How do you expect to perform according to your scoring system?

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Protest

Before you begin, READ THE WHOLE WORKSHEET carefully so that you can plan the way in which you will tackle the different tasks and how long you intend spend doing each of them.

Stories about people protesting are normally covered in much the same way: a typical news report will tell us who is protesting, where, since when, why, and what kind of action the protesters are taking. Normally, protesters are confronting some kind of authority: government, company, etc. The questions below are based on these assumptions. However, you must be aware that:

- not all questions will be applicable to every protest situation;
- not every question will be answered in every news report;
- you may simply not be able to understand some of the answers at your present level: don't let this worry you and just do the best you can.

1. **Watch the report two or three times, trying to answer the following questions:**
    1. Where is the protest taking place? (sometimes action may be taken in several places at the same time)
    2. How long has it been going on for?
    3. Who are the protesters?
    4. Who else (if anyone) supports the protest?
    5. Which authority are the protesters opposing?
    6. What caused the protest initially? (there may be more than one cause)
    7. What do the protesters demand? (they may want several things)
    8. What action(s) are the protesters taking?
    9. What action(s) is the authority taking in response to the protesters' action?
    10. What seems the most likely outcome of the crisis at this particular point in time? (is further action envisaged, is an agreement likely to be reached soon, etc)

2. **Cross out any questions that are not applicable to this particular story or that remain unanswered in the news report.**

3. **Imagine that you are a language teacher writing comprehension questions for a class. Write at least two additional questions that could be asked about this particular report. You may write questions that you are not able to answer yourself, so long as you know for sure that the answer is given somewhere in the report (locating information is the first step towards full comprehension).**

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4. Make a note of any useful words that were said by the speakers.

Don't skip the follow-up!

- *It is designed to help you measure your achievement.*
- *It will also ensure that new vocabulary is retained in your memory.*

5. Follow-up: Make sure you do at least ONE of these each time!

If your main problem is comprehension:

- Try to give your revised version of this worksheet to somebody else and see if their answers are similar to your own. You can learn a lot from a simple discussion of your answers with another person.
- Try to find another reference to this story in the written press of the same country and compare the two reports. You can either buy/borrow a foreign newspaper or look it up on the Internet.

If your main problem is writing and grammar:

- Write a summary of the story in the foreign language, following the tips below:
- Include all the information provided in the answers to the questions in your revised worksheet. Write it up as two or three paragraphs, making sure that you link the ideas together and it 'flows' like good prose.
- Try to use any new words learnt from the speakers.
- You will probably want to show your summary to somebody else for feedback (if there is no teacher or native speaker available, a slightly more advanced student can be just as helpful).

If your main problem is lack of fluency:

- Try to tell the story yourself in the foreign language, following the tips below:
- If you have no-one to speak to, you can do this exercise mentally, but it is important that you actually 'speak' every word in your head, forming complete sentences.
- Don't look at the questions and answers that you have written (reading out full sentences won't improve your fluency!) Just jot down a few isolated key words if you need to.
- Try to remember and summarise all the information provided in your written answers.
- Try to use any new words learnt from the speakers in this report.

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French Language Project 1996

Examples of Negotiated Assessment Tests

1

Aim Gain new vocabulary and improve grammar.

Input from student Short newspaper article on Michael Jackson, summarised in French by the student.

Test proposed by student *'Will learn my text by heart: may test me either by saying it by heart or by writing it down by heart. If not enough, ask questions on text.'*

Marking criteria *'If writing text down, score negatively for each error made.'*

Test given by tutor[16]

Sans regarder le résumé:

1. Ecris le texte sur Michael Jackson en français (ce n'est pas nécessaire que ton texte soit identique à l'original, mais le français doit être correct!).

En utilisant le résumé:

2. Ecris 5 questions sur le contenu du texte, ainsi que leurs réponses correctes.

2

Aims
1. Listening with a focus on vocabulary ➜ learn 100 words from hearing them.
2. Improve sentence subordination through passage writing.

Input from student Vocabulary list (100 words).

Test proposed by student No suggestion.

Marking criteria No suggestion.

Test given by tutor

Invente une histoire ou un mini-essai en utilisant tous les mots de ta liste qui commencent par la lettre C.

16. The form 'tu' is used here when addressing university students because the more formal 'vous' would not have suited the co-operative, non-hierarchical nature of the relationship that existed between this small group of students and their tutor.

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3

Aims
1. Learn 100 words of vocabulary.
2. Forms and uses of *passé composé, imparfait, plus-que-parfait.*

Input from student Word list.

Test proposed by student
1. Vocabulary: Re-use words in writing.
2. Grammar: drill set by tutor.

Marking criteria No suggestion.

Test given by tutor
Invente 5 phrases (pas trop courtes!). Chacune doit contenir au moins *deux* mots de ta liste *commençant par D.* Toutes les phrases doivent contenir au moins un verbe au passé.

4

Aims
1. Understand more spoken French.
2. Improve use of imperferct tense.

Input from student Summary of the film *Les amants du Pont-Neuf,* previously corrected by the tutor.

Test proposed by student No suggestion.

Marking criteria No suggestion.

Test given by tutor
1. All past tense verbs in the summary made into gaps to be filled in by the student.
2. Additional questions to clarify ambiguities in the plot.

5

Aims
1. Gaining confidence in speaking: coping with real-life situations.
2. Improve grammar in written French.

Input from student
1. Letter requesting information on skiing resorts.
2. Leaflets obtained in reply to the letter.
3. List of questions for interlocutor in role-play, with English translations.

Test proposed by student Role-play performed with tutor as interlocutor.

Marking criteria No suggestion. Later, checklist of criteria was provided to the student for self-assessment of oral performance.

Test given by tutor
'Tu travailles au service de renseignements d' une école de ski. Réponds aux questions que te pose cette cliente.'

Tutor's questions not identical to those suggested by student + new problems to solve, using information from the leaflets.

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6

Aims
1. Improve speaking, with concentration on argument.
2. Writing (aim for previous test was: 'improve sentence subordination through passage writing').

Input from student List of possible phrases for using in arguments.
Revised version of text written for the previous test.

Test proposed by student
1. Recorded discussion.
2. Rewrite last assessment.

Marking criteria No suggestion. Later, a checklist of criteria was provided to the students for self-assessment of oral performance.

Test given by tutor

1. Discussion with a partner (recorded on tape and submitted to tutor).
2. Gap-filling based on text written in previous test: Complète le texte, en évitant de répéter les mots *'mais', 'alors'* et *'parce que'*.
3. Remplace le verbe *être* (en caractères gras dans le texte) par un autre verbe. Ecris les nouvelles phrases ci-dessous:

7

Aim To understand more spoken French from the media.

Input from student List of four video documentaries available at the Language Centre that the student has prepared (transcripts available).

Test proposed by student No suggestion.

Marking criteria No suggestion.

Test given by tutor

1. Va au laboratoire et regarde le video du reportage intitulé 'Taggers'. Ecoute bien le commentaire et observe à quel moment le commentaire correspond aux images. Note tes observations dans le tableau suivant:

Quand le commentaire dit . . . *(Transcris exactement les mots du commentaire que l'on "voit" aussi dans les images)*	**On voit . . .** *(Décris les images qui illustrent cette partie du commentaire)*

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8

Aims
1. Learn new vocabulary on football from the news and *L'Equipe* newspaper.
2. Learn verbs in present tense.

Input from student Word list related to football (taken from 2 sources above).

Test proposed by student No suggestion.

Marking criteria No suggestion.

Test given by tutor

1. Tu es journaliste sportif et on t'a demandé d'écrire un petit article (d'environ 100 mots) sur la situation de l'équipe de Newcastle après son dernier match contre Nottingham Forest. Si tu préfères, tu peux parler d'une autre équipe, mais tu dois expliquer sa situation *en ce moment.*
2. Conjugue les trois verbes suivants au présent de l'indicatif:

   sauver *aller* *embellir*

9

Aims
1. Learn personal pronouns.
2. Watch and understand a French film.

Input from student Summary of the film *Le samouraï.*

Test proposed by student *'Spotting and explaining examples of personal pronouns in a text.'*

Marking criteria No suggestion.

Test given by tutor

1. Analyse des pronoms personnels

Analyse les pronoms soulignés dans le texte, en expliquant pour chacun:
1. La personne (1ère, 2ème ou 3ème)
2. Le genre (pour la 3ème personne seulement) et le nombre (singulier, pluriel)
3. La fonction (sujet, complément d´objet direct, complément d´attribution)

Résumé du film *Le Samouraï*

C'est un film à suspense sur un homme qui est soudoyé pour tuer un homme. ***Il*** *(1) entre dans le club, descend des couloirs et arrive dans la pièce où se trouve sa victime. Il ouvre la porte, tire sur l'homme et* ***le*** *(2) tue. Mais une femme, la pianiste du club, est témoin de son acte. La police soupçonne beacoup de gens et* ***les*** *(3) interroge. Le témoignage de la pianiste est vital pour identifier l'assassin. La police* ***lui*** *(4) demande si elle se rappelle bien du crime. Elle* ***l'****(5) a très bien vu, mais* ***elle*** *(6) fait semblant de ne pas le reconnaître et il est libéré. Depuis cet incident, il est obsédé par cette femme qui ne l'a pas dénoncé à la police, et il voudrait bien savoir pourquoi elle ne* ***leur*** *(7) dit rien. Il pense: '****Je*** *(8) ne* ***te*** *(9) comprends pas. Pourquoi est-ce que* ***tu*** *(10) ne parles pas?' Finalement, l'assassin meurt. C'est cette obsession qui le tue.*

2. Traduis les phrases suivantes, en faisant bien attention aux pronoms soulignés

1. *I am going to tell <u>you</u> a little story.*
2. *I often tell <u>it</u> to my children and <u>they</u> like <u>it</u> very much.*
3. *I tell <u>them</u> the story of a little lady who lives very far away . . .* (and so on)

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Oral Test: Scoring Sheet

1. Write down in the first column all the ideas that you had to get across in this task.
2. Decide how much each of them is worth in terms of communication and accuracy (you have a total of 15 points to allocate within each of these criteria).
3. Listen to the tape and rate your performance using the scale provided on the next page.

Units of meaning to be conveyed in this task	**Communication**		**Accuracy**	
Task title: Opening a bank account	***Score***	***Out of***	***Score***	***Out of***
Saying that I want to open a bank account	3	3	3	3
Asking about special accounts for students	3	3	2	3
Giving my personal details	2	3	2	3
Enquiring about overdraft conditions	1	3	0	3
Asking for a cashpoint card	3	3	3	3
Total for task completion	12	15	10	15

General oral skills	***Score***	***Out of***
Fluency	1.5	4
Pronunciation	3	4
Active vocabulary range	1.5	4
Comprehension	3	4
Initiative and use of compensatory strategies other than L1	3	4
Total for general oral skills	12	20

Total score	34	50

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Oral Test: Marking Criteria

Communication *(scores given below may be proportionally divided if there are many ideas in the task)*

Score	*Meaning*
3	Idea fully conveyed as intended, with no breakdowns in communication.
2	Got the idea across, with only minor problems easily solved.
1	The idea can be understood, but only with some effort on the interlocutor's part.
0	An un-trained native speaker would not be able to understand the idea.

Accuracy *(scores given below may be proportionally divided if there are many ideas in the task)*

Score	*Meaning*
3	Virtually no mistakes in expressing this idea, given my present level.
2	No major mistakes, given my present level.
1	One major grammatical mistake, other structures OK.
0	More than one major mistake in trying to convey this unit of meaning.

Fluency

Score	*Meaning*
4	Outstanding for my present level.
3	More fluent than could be expected at my present level.
2	Normal for level, no major problems.
1	Slower tan normal, requires some patience on the interlocutor's part.
0	Too slow for communication to be possible.

Pronunciation

Score	*Meaning*
4	Outstandingly good.
3	Better than could be expected at my present level.
2	Normal for this level, no major problems.
1	A few problems that might occasionally affect comprehension.
0	Some serious problems, making comprehension difficult.

Active vocabulary

Score	*Meaning*
4	Outstanding range of vocabulary, given my present level.
3	Active vocabulary is beyond the set range for my level.
2	Normal command of basic vocabulary for my level.
1	Able to use only part of the basic vocabulary expected at my level.
0	Unable to use most of the basic vocabulary expected at my level.

Comprehension

Score	*Meaning*
4	I understood both familiar and less familiar input.
3	I understood all familiar input and some of the less familiar.
2	I understood most familiar input.
1	I understood only part of the most familiar input.
0	I failed to understand substantial amounts of what should be familiar input.

Initiative and strategies

Score	*Meaning*
4	Took control throughout the conversation / used verbal strategies (paraphrase, prompts for help in the foreign language, etc) consistently to compensate gaps in knowledge.
3	Took more initiative than strictly required in the task bnef / used compensatory strategies spontaneously at least once
2	Took initiative as explicitly required by task brief / responded readily to help offered by the interlocutor when communication became difficult.
1	Needed a fair amount of prompting to complete the task / only used strategies with great amounts of help
0	Did not speak unless (even when) prompted / failed to respond to all help offered

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Self-Evaluation Questionnaire

Student's name .....

Here are the criteria that the examiners are going to use in order to evaluate your presentation. As you have put a great deal of effort in this project, they would like to know what you think of your own performance. Any serious discrepancies between their opinion an your own will be carefully examined.

	Marking criteria	*Points given*
1.	**Comprehensibility of the gist** perfectly clear (6 points); reasonably clear (3 points); not quite clear (1 point); not clear at all (0 point).	
2.	**Fluency** excellent for level (6); good for level (4); reasonable (2); slower than usual (1); far too slow for level (0).	
3.	**Accuracy** occasionally minor mistakes (6); frequent mistakes, but mostly minor (4); one serious mistake (2); a few serious mistakes (1); unacceptable (0). Two additional points may be given if you often correct your own mistakes. Maximum score: 6.	
4.	**Production/presentation skills** some evidence of on-line production – even if it means more mistakes (6); sounds all learnt by heart, but convincing (4); sounds by heart, not very convincing (2); serious difficulties in retrieving ideas and/or words (0). If the script is longer than could be memorised at this level of language proficiency, two further points may be given to compensate for the added difficulty. Maximum score: 6.	
5.	**Use of supporting material** supporting materials intelligently used (6); visuals used occasionally, but could have been used more effectively (2); visual support not used effectively (1); visual support not used at all (0).	

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Peer Feedback Report

Speaker's name ..... Listener's name .....

1 How interesting was the topic to you?

.....

2. Was the talk easy to understand? (if not, explain why not)

.....

3. Did you notice any particular problems with language accuracy?

.....

4. Was the speaking rate too fast or too slow? .....

5. Did the speaker's body language help to get the point across and keep you interested? (if not, explain why not)

.....

6. Summarise the three or four main points made, trying to follow the same structure that was used in the speaker's talk.

7. What was the main strength of this talk?

.....

8. Make one suggestion for improvement:

.....

Writing Test: Scoring Sheet

1. Write down in the first column all the ideas that you had to get across in this task.
2. Decide how much each of them is worth in terms of communication and accuracy (you have a total of 15 points to allocate within each of these criteria).
3. Read again what you wrote and rate your text using the scale provided on the next page.

	Units of meaning to be conveyed in this task	**Communication**		**Accuracy**	
	Task title: Question 5 (Note a friend)	***Score***	***Out of***	***Score***	***Out of***
1	*Explain why you have to go*	2	2	1	2
2	*Tell her what she can do about breakfast*	2	2	1.5	2
3	*Ask her to buy some bread for lunch*	3	3	2	3
4	*. . . (baker's just opposite your house)*	0	3	1	3
5	*Tell her that you will be back for lunch*	2	2	0	2
6	*. . . around 2.15 pm*	3	3	2	3
	Total for task completion	12	15	7.5	15

General Writing skills	***Score***	***Out of***
Active vocabulary range	2	3
Style	2	4
Originality	1	3
Total for general writing skills	5	10

Total score	24	40

Writing Test: Marking Criteria

Task-specific criteria

Question 5: Writing task

		Communication	*Accuracy*	*Score*
Point 1	Explain why you have to go	[2] out of...	[2] out of...	
Point 2	Tell her what she can do about breakfast	[2]	[2]	
Point 3	Ask her to buy some break for lunch (baker's just opposite your house)	[1] [1]	[1] [1]	
Point 4	Tell her that you will be back for lunch around 2.15 pm	[1] / [1]	[1] / [1]	
Originality / general cohesion		*Orig.* [2]	*Coh.* [2]	

Question 5 score: ..... out of 20

General performance descriptions (applicable to all writing tasks)

Communication *(scores given below may be proportionally divided if there are many ideas in the task)*

Score	*Meaning*
3	Idea fully conveyed as intended, with no breakdowns in communication.
2	Got the idea across, with only minor problems easily solved.
1	The idea can be understood, but only with some effort on the reader's part.
0	An un-trained native reader would not be able to understand the idea.

Accuracy *(scores given below may be proportionally divided if there are many ideas in the task)*

Score	*Meaning*
3	Virtually no mistakes in expressing this idea, given my present level.
2	No major mistakes, given my present level.
1	One major grammatical mistake, other structures OK.
0	More than one major mistake in trying to convey this unit of meaning.

Active vocabulary

Score	*Meaning*
3	Active vocabulary is beyond the set range for my level.
2	Normal command of basic vocabulary for my level.
1	Able to use only part of the basic vocabulary expected at my level.
0	Unable to use most of the basic vocabulary expected at my level.

Style

Score	*Meaning*
4	The text reads very well and sentences flow very naturally.
3	Reads fairly well and there is evidence of efforts to link sentences together.
2	The text reads adequately for my level, though it sounds unnatural in places.
1	Reads like a succession of sentences with little connection between them.
0	Sentences are so un-connected that the result cannot really be regarded as a text.

Originality

Score	*Meaning*
3	The level of elaboration goes well beyond the basc requirements of the task.
2	Fulfills task requirements with some original detail.
1	The text is reasonably credible, though not particularly original.
0	Uses only standard formulae straight from the coursebook.

Self-Study Plan

Self-Evaluation Questionnaire

Student's name .....

General goals

What were the main goals that you set yourself at the beginning of this course? *(please copy them as they appear on your Learning Contract)*

Goal 1 .....

Goal 2 .....

Goal 3 .....

How well did you manage to achieve these goals? *(tick as appropriate)*

	Fully achieved	*Mostly achieved*	*Only partly achieved*	*Not achieved at all*
Goal 1				
Goal 2				
Goal 3				

First progress report and test no. 1

Look at your first Progress Report (forget about the actual test for the moment). What were the two goals that you set yourself for the first period of the course, and how well do you think that you achieved them? *(please write down your goals exactly as they appear at the top of your Progress Report)*

	Fully achieved	*Mostly achieved*	*Only partly achieved*	*Not achieved at all*
Goal 1	☐	☐	☐	☐
Goal 2	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please explain your evaluation:

How relevant to these goals were the materials that you chose during the first period of your course?

Very relevant	*Fairly relevant*	*Not quite relevant*	*Not relevant at all*
☐	☐	☐	☐

Please justify your choice of materials:

How much variety was there in the materials that you used during this period?

Quite a lot	*Enough*	*Not quite enough*	*Not much at all*
☐	☐	☐	☐

Please justify your answer (give examples of variety, or explain why you could not / chose not to introduce more variety in the materials that you used):

Now look at your first test and give yourself a mark based on your test performance (the overall mark must be out of 10). Split up the 10 points between the different test questions as you think is fairest:

Task description / test question	*Mark*	*Out of*

Test score: ..... *out of 10*

Please comment on your performance in test no.1:

Second progress report and test no. 2

Look at your second Progress Report (forget about the actual test for the moment). What were the two goals that you set yourself for the second period of the course, and how well do you think that you achieved them? *(please write down your goals exactly as they appear at the top of your Progress Report)*

	Fully achieved	*Mostly achieved*	*Only partly achieved*	*Not achieved at all*
Goal 1	☐	☐	☐	☐
.....				
Goal 2	☐	☐	☐	☐
.....				

Please explain your evaluation:

How relevant to these goals were the materials that you chose during the first period of your course?

Very relevant	*Fairly relevant*	*Not quite relevant*	*Not relevant at all*
☐	☐	☐	☐

Please justify your choice of materials:

How much variety was there in the materials that you used during this period?

Quite a lot	*Enough*	*Not quite enough*	*Not much at all*
☐	☐	☐	☐

Please justify your answer (give examples of variety, or explain why you could not / chose not to introduce more variety in the materials that you used):

Now look at your second test and give yourself a mark based on your test performance (the overall mark must be out of 10). Split up the 10 points between the different test questions as you think is fairest:

Task description / test question	*Mark*	*Out of*

Test score: ..... out of 10

Please comment on your performance in test no. 2:

Progress made

What would you regard as your greatest achievement during the self-study programme?

How would you describe yourself as a language learner?

In future self-study situations, what would you tackle in a different way?

Language Project

Course Schedule: Semester 1 (1996–97)

Week	*Timetabled session*	*Set work*
Week 1 *11/10/96*	Introduction to the course. What do I need to learn?	Prepare study plan (4 page booklet) for week 2. Choose topic for project.
Week 2 *17/10/96*	Introduction to self-study techniques. Introduction to the project. Bring study plan & make appointment for week 3 tutorial.	Choose project topic. Must be decided for starting date on week 4.
Week 3 *24/10/96*	**Tutorial (room 3.4)** *(20 mins per student).* Discussion of study plan and learning contract (individually).	Start work for report 1 (to be discussed with language tutors on week 4).
Week 4 *1/11/96*	Project work in groups: get help from teacher and partners to complete script in French/Spanish/German. Bring report 1 to discuss best assessment format.	Continue work on script. Bring draft copy on week 5 (**keep old copies** for later comparisons). Bring in visual aids too (charts, models, etc). Continue work for report 1 (copy of report to be submitted on week 5 for assessment on week 6).
Week 5 *7/11/96*	Continuing work on project script (putting it in simple words). Submit report 1 so that language tutors can prepare tests for assessment.	Start memorising your script. Start analysing all changes made to the script so far (bring all on week 7).
Week 6 *14/11/96*	Assessment based on report 1. Continue memorising project script.	Continuing work on project script for rehearsal on week 8. Start working on report 2 (to be shown to language tutor on week 7).
Week 7 *21/11/96*	Feedback on test 1. Bring report 2 to discuss plans. Project: comparing successive script write-ups and analysing all corrections made so far.	Continue working towards objectives stated in progress report 2. Tidy up comparison of successive versions of the script for final dossier (comprehensive study to be submitted for assessment on week 11).
		continued

Language Project

Course Schedule: Semester 1 (1996–97) *(continued)*

Week	*Timetabled session*	*Set work*
Week 8 *28/11/96*	Script rehearsal in groups.	Continue work on progress report 2 (to be brought on week 9 for discussion of assessment format). Revise script if necessary and learn final version by week 10.
Week 9 *5/12/96*	Script rehearsal, focusing on problem areas Bring report 2 for discussion of best assessment format.	Practice problem areas in script (must be fully memorised by week 10)
4 weeks	**CHRISTMAS VACATION**	Continue individual work throughout the Christmas vacation
Week 10 *9/1/97*	Submit report 2 so that language tutors can prepare tests for assessment. Script rehearsal in groups.	Prepare for assessment test 2. Learn script for dress rehearsal on week 11.
Week 11 *16/1/97*	Assessment based on report 2. Dress rehearsal (without notes, non-stop, and using same visual aids as on week 12).	Practice presentation skills for video session on week 12.
Week 12 23/1/97	**FILMING SESSION**	
Week beg. 3/2/97 (date & time to be arranged)	**EVALUATION SESSION** Viewing of edited videos with the language tutors. Preparing dossiers for final assessment of the self-study plan.	

The increasing importance of Learner Autonomy as a feature of language teaching and learning has created the need for suitable learner training programmes. **Training Learners for Self-Instruction** shows how such programmes can be designed and delivered in a variety of possible formats, to suit the needs and constraints of a wide range of learner profiles in different institutions.

Training Learners for Self-Instruction presents practical solutions throughout, ranging from needs analysis to resourcing, strategy training and monitoring tools. Special emphasis is placed on different ways in which learners can be supported by learning how to analyse their needs and set their own goals, how to choose the most effective means to reach those goals, and how to monitor their own progress. Students' response to this approach is also discussed, as well as key issues such as formal assessment of learner training modules, staff training and teaching quality. A wide range of photocopiable templates is provided in the appendices, including needs analysis, self-study worksheets, self-evaluation questionnaire, assessment ideas and a course schedule.

The book is largely based on the author's experience at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, but also takes into account existing differences across the education sector. The practical approach offers multiple alternatives and templates for customised materials design, and will make the book relevant to language professionals in universities, adult education, further education colleges, and even secondary schools.

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